The **future** of **interactive** entertainment **UK edition** Christmas 1997 **£3.50** ¥2,100 ®

EDGE

PlayStation ■ Saturn ■ Nintendo 64 ■ PC ■ Arcade ■ Net ■ Multimedia

Rare: exposing the minds behind the mystique

Once a founding father of the 8bit scene, now a company blazing a trail through 64bit pastures with *GoldenEye* and *Diddy Kong Racing*, Rare has rightly earned its place in the videogame superleague. Edge gains privileged access to one of the most clandestine development studios in the world for an exclusive insight into its art. And the first question is...

Marketing wars

Selling the videogame dream

New genre alert!

Digital dancing with Enix

Over 30 games reviewed including:

Diddy Kong Racing
Blade Runner
Monkey Island III
Crash Bandicoot 2
Pandemonium 2
TOCA Touring Car
Sega Touring Car
Sonic R
Uprising
Test Drive 4
Dead or Alive

RAREWARE™

So what's the secret?


03.11.97

Rare occupies a unique position in the UK software market. For its videogames aren't necessarily designed with the UK in mind at all – rather it is America, Japan, and indeed the whole world that has become its main consideration. Via its relationship with Nintendo, Rare has long enjoyed a privileged gateway to a truly vast international market, and chooses to cater for boundless global tastes rather than the more introverted gaming niches sustained by the typical '90s developer.

Of course, its enormous success over the years has stockpiled the kind of resources that most other developers can only dream of. But it seems the company's unique culture and unconventional attitude play just as important a role in moulding its titles into the million-selling successes they increasingly seem to be.

Ironically, this month's exhaustive 14-page report was originally planned for the magazine's first anniversary issue over three years ago. Since then, the company has grudgingly come around to the idea of breaking its infamous vow of silence and revealing more of its operation. Naturally, **Edge** was only too happy to help it share a few secrets...

Printed in the UK
© Future Publishing 1997
Voted magazine of the year
Industry awards
ABC (Audit Bureau of Circulation)

Contacts

Editorial

Future Publishing
30 Monmouth Street
Bath, BANES BA1 2BW
Telephone: 01225 442244
Fax: 01225 732274
email: edge@futurenet.co.uk

Subscriptions

Future Publishing Ltd
FREEPOST BS4900, Somerton
Somerset TA11 7BR
Telephone Customer Services:
01225 822510
Telephone Customer order line:
01225 822511
Fax: 01458 274378

People on Edge

Jason Brookes editor
Tony Mott associate editor
João Sanches writer
Caspar Field writer
Terry Stokes art editor
Craig Brooks deputy art editor
Nicolas di Costanzo Tokyo bureau

Joanna Paget advertising manager
Tarik Browne classifieds
Jane Geddes recruitment
0171 447 3309
Advertising fax 0171 447 3399
Zoe Rogers production coordinator
Richard Gingell production manager
Production fax 01225 732293
Sarah Orchard ad design
Janet Anderson production controller
Judith Green group prod manager
Jon Moore pre-press services coordinator
Simon Windsor colour scanning
Mark Gover, **Jason Titley**, **Oliver Gibbs** pre-press services
Mark Williams foreign licenses
0171 331 3924
Jane Ingham publishing director
Greg Ingham managing director
Nick Alexander chairman

Colour reproduction

Colourworks Repro, Bristol
Phoenix Repro, Bath

Print

Cradley Print, Warley, West Midlands
Edge is printed on Royal Press 90gsm

Production of Edge

Hardware Power Macintosh, PowerBook, IIsi by Apple
Software *QuarkXPress*, Adobe *Photoshop*, Aldus *FreeHand*, *Pixar Typestry* and *Nisus*
Typography (Adobe®)
TPCavalier Medium/***Extrabold***
Arbitrary Regular/**bold**
Formata light/**regular/medium/bold**
Vectora light/**bold/black**
AmoebiaSans/**Impact** & Base
Fifth colours: Pantone® 8380/871







GALLERY
CGI of the highest order from some of the most skilled artists around

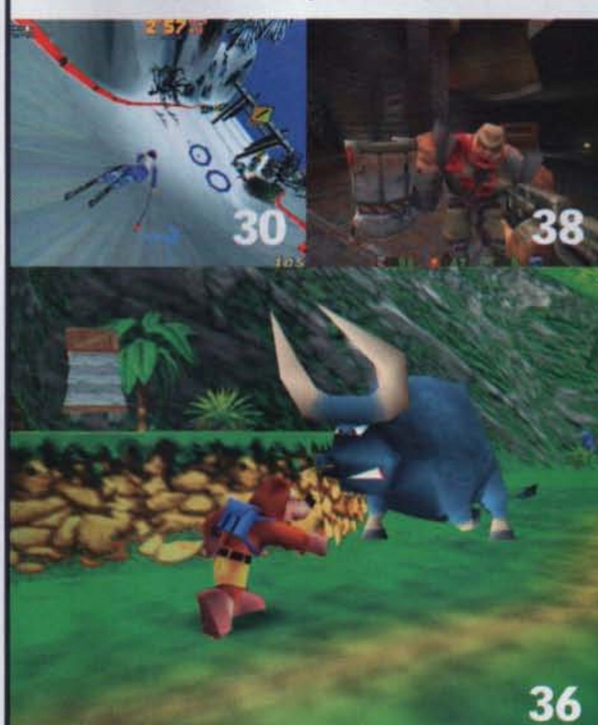
TESTSCREEN
The most honest, definitive videogame reviews in the world





MARKETING 60
Edge examines how Sony, Sega and Nintendo tout their wares

PRESCREEN 29
The games set to warm players during the coldest months of the year, including Rare's *Banjo-Kazooie*



VIEWPOINT

EXPRESS YOURSELF IN **EDGE** – WRITE TO: LETTERS, **EDGE**, 30 MONMOUTH STREET, BATH, BA1 2BW (EMAIL: edge@futurenet.co.uk)

Despite the advent of 3D accelerators, I find that PC games still lack the responsive controls of consoles. I suspect **Edge** concurs with this assessment, as your 'Videogames On The Edge' section frequently lists only console games as your office favourites.

In **E**52 you rated *TOCA* on the PlayStation because of its responsive controls. Perhaps you will agree that there is something less immediate about PC games – in many cases there is a brief pause before a PC game will respond to keyboard or joypad inputs.

After comparing PlayStation *Tomb Raider* with the 3Dfx version, there's no denying the graphical superiority of the PC. However, the sheer playability and responsiveness of PlayStation *Tomb Raider*'s controls made me prefer it to the slinky graphics of the PC. I recently played *GoldenEye* and found that to be far more playable than *Quake*, especially in its fourplayer mode.

I think the problem for PC games is the lack of a standard controller. All consoles have a standard joypad style, so designers can tailor their game to make the most of that pad. For the PC all the designer knows is that the player will have a keyboard and mouse. The PC is well suited to strategy games, but for fast-paced action titles like *Quake*, it's still too slow to compete with consoles.

Simon Wilmer,
via email

Given that PC's graphics technology has already become more than a match for even the Nintendo 64, unwieldy is perhaps a more appropriate term than 'slow'. However, you do make some valid points and **Edge** often has to sample both PC and console versions of the same game in order to keep abreast of relative performance. Often **Edge** opts for the superior controls and easy loading of console versions, although occasionally, as is the case with *GTA*, the PC version will come out on top in almost every respect. As you say, until the PC's non-standardised control systems are addressed it will remain at a permanent disadvantage for many types of games.

I am absolutely sick to death of the blatant favouritism your magazine (and most other industry publications, I might add) seems to show towards the California-based 3Dfx company. This is not only annoying for the informed reader, but also very damaging to rival companies, especially in light of the recent and continuing 3D war.

This bias is most prevalent in the Prescreen section of your magazine, where you simply cannot resist printing flattering remarks about the Voodoo chipset at every available opportunity. It's either '3Dfx this...' or '3Dfx that' or 'so-and-so said this' about 3Dfx.

And all this despite the fact that about 99% of these prescreen titles utilise Direct3D and are not 3Dfx native. There are other 3D cards out there, you know.

Stephen A Mackintosh,
Edinburgh

Despite the existence of several 3D accelerator cards, 3Dfx's Voodoo board is rapidly establishing itself as the current standard chosen by the majority of developers. Proof of this can be seen in the proportion of PC titles in this month's Testscreen roundup boasting 3Dfx-only support. Publishers will continue to release titles supporting several cards until it becomes economically unfeasible, which could be sooner rather than later given 3Dfx's established user base in the profitable and therefore all-important US market.

Following your interview with studio bosses at ECTS, I'd like to congratulate your interviewer and the industry people for thinking creatively about the structure of games – not just graphical direction. I would like to comment, if I may.

The fact is that games are terribly limited in scope. Instead of creating an intriguing storyline in a challenging environment, where the story develops as a result of the player's logic, strategy, and a little lateral thinking (I'm referring mainly to RPGs here, though the complaint extends to other genres), we are short-changed. We're given a shallow world where the only challenge is harder and harder bosses. I for one don't want six months of tearing my hair out just because an enemy is just too hard – that's not entertainment.

Imagine getting part of the way through a mystery novel and having to abandon it because the hero has been slaughtered by a slavering beast! One might suggest that this is because the author lacks the imagination to finish the story in a satisfactory way. Industry types take note: games need not be always be about killing as a challenge.

Michael Kelly,
via email

Corporate blindness strikes deep. In **E**52 Dave Perry mentioned the 'never done before' model helicopter simulator Shiny is in the process of developing.

Oops. A company called RC Simulations made one some time ago (including a proper controller) for the Atari, Amiga and PC.

Jose Commins,
address witheld

Despite evidence to the contrary, Dave Perry is human and, as such, prone to make the odd mistake.

Regular readers may remember the features you did on emulation a few months ago. This sparked my interest in the topic and I have since been involved in the field, with my own dedicated website. I think it would be interesting if you revisited this topic as the past months have seen some fascinating changes.

No longer is the scene dedicated to emulating the classic machines of yesteryear (though this is still of course a huge area). Today's emulation scene is fixated with more contemporary machines such as the SNES, PlayStation and Saturn.

The feature concluded by saying that SNES emulation was something to watch. Indeed you were right, as it is now possible to emulate 80% of the standard SNES (with sound) on a humble PC.

Even superconsoles such as the PlayStation are gradually being recreated on our PCs. Obviously emulation is basic, but many will be stunned to hear that a handful of games are currently playable.

No longer is emulation confined to 8bit classics. It is so much more than retrogaming, it is a whole new culture, and one that is almost as fast-paced as traditional console development. I think many would be surprised just what is possible – and what is round the corner.

Chris Wright,
via email

Edge has indeed kept up with the rapidly evolving world of emulators, and an update on the scene will appear in these pages soon.

Despite converting to the N64 shortly before the price drop, I wasn't too distraught. This move may have been due to the fact that the N64 is doing badly sales-wise, but I hope Nintendo achieves its aim and achieves level pegging with Sony over the festive season.

If it manages to occupy the coveted number one spot over Christmas, Nintendo might just rethink its European marketing strategy. As you already know N64 games can be bought for the reasonable price of around £50, and with top-rated games such as *GoldenEye* selling for even less, the N64 will hopefully not fall into the same trap as the Saturn – or become a forgotten relic like the 3DO and Jaguar.

As a previous PlayStation owner I sincerely believed that the N64 arrived too late to compete with Sony's little grey box. Until the price drop, that is. Now I hope that Nintendo's masterpeice will rocket in sales, and that European owners will be granted access to the software they richly deserve.

James Eldridge,
Essex

Cutting Edge

The latest news from the world of interactive entertainment



The VM Labs team comprises a vast swathe of Atari refugees, including veterans of the Jaguar project, as well as key staff persuaded to defect from Sony

PLAYSTATION/N64 BEATER UNVEILED AT VM LABS

After months of rumour and speculation, VM Labs has officially confirmed to **Edge** that Project X, a major new gaming platform, exists and is on schedule for release in late 1998. According to CEO **Richard Miller**, the company has forged partnerships with 'several of the top half dozen or so consumer electronics companies in the world.' Additionally, the hardware specs are complete, 'prominent' thirdparty publishers are in possession of development kits, and, as **Edge** goes to press, the second iteration of the chipset has been delivered to VM Labs' Californian headquarters. 'The chip is very real, and working fine,' smiles Miller.

The Californian-based company isn't willing to show all of its hand just yet, however. 'Today, we're simply confirming that we exist,' explains Miller. 'It's too early for us to reveal to our competitors our entire strategy.' **Nicholas Lefevre**, VM Labs' vice president of business affairs and general counsel, explains: 'Our real coming out party will be sometime early next year.' But although Project X's core specification and the identity of VM Labs' key partners remain secret, **Edge** has learned enough to consider Project X a viable contender.

At the core of VM Labs is a team of 27 experienced engineers, led by CEO Miller, many of whom spent their formative years under the auspices of Atari. Miller himself was VP of technology at Atari from 1989 to 1994, while John Mathieson, VM Labs' VP of technology, is credited as 'the father of Jaguar'. As well as Atari alumni, the VM Labs team boasts experience working on 3DO's original Opera chipset, M2 I/O hardware and peripherals, Sinclair's Spectrum and QL projects, and Apple. Game designer Jeff Minter, creator of *Tempest 2000* and notorious industry veteran, is also on board. Greg LaBrec, previously at Sony, was sufficiently impressed by Project X to sign up, and yet further credibility was granted to Project X in early November, when **Bill Rehbock** (another ex-Atari figure) also jumped ship from Sony to become VM Labs' vice president of thirdparty development. Why leave Sony, at the height of the PlayStation's success? 'They knocked my socks off,' Rehbock explains. 'I wouldn't have left [Sony] unless this was a sure thing.'

Miller strenuously denied speculation that Project X is a 64bit system. 'The argument that more bits are better doesn't hold water,' he says. 'This doesn't mean that we don't have more bits – we do. But it's a crazy game to get into – we got into that situation with the Jaguar and it was terrible.' What he can offer is that Project X is 'substantially' more powerful than the PlayStation or Nintendo 64.

'At the heart of Project X is some graphics technology that is really quite different to anything you've talked about in **Edge** before,' Miller claims. But those looking for benchmark polygon-per-second counts will be disappointed.

'We're not going to try and force games into any particular mode,' explains Lefevre. 'The graphics will be appropriate to the game, and not the other way around.' Certainly, many experts in the computer graphics industry believe that the next generation of machines will not be exclusively polygon based. But at this stage VM Labs will neither confirm nor deny that it is travelling down this particular avenue.

What has been confirmed is that more than one company will be manufacturing Project X machines. In this respect, the project echoes 3DO's approach – but this is a

Cutting Edge Cuttings

Pocket Monster for monster pockets
Recent announcements suggest that *Pocket Monster 2* will be compatible with both the Game Boy and N64. Apparently, gamers will be able to link the two machines together, using the N64 to display their monsters in glorious 3D. It is also suspected that the title will be compatible with the N64DD.

Sony says no to cheap games
Japanese punters are being denied the chance to purchase PlayStation games at discounted rates. Sony is spending millions buying back unsold games from retailers, supposedly to prevent consumers becoming confused about the price of games. Huge discounts on older games are common in Japan, which would devalue the PlayStation brand in the eyes of the public. But with the PlayStation having been on release for three years there, the move has perhaps come a little late in the day.

A big no for 3DO
Apparently because the man on the street has such a low opinion of the 3DO moniker, the





VM Labs has been working with veteran coder Jeff Minter, who has produced a series of Project X demos. It can certainly handle llamas...



The proprietary Project X chips in all their inconspicuous glory

comparison with which VM Labs is understandably uneasy. 'We'd rather not see those three letters anywhere in the article,' Lefevre laughs.

Miller jumps straight to the point. 'After spending a few minutes showing what Project X can do, publishers don't seem to want to make the comparison with 3DO at all.' But comparisons with the business model are inevitable, and this manufacturing strategy will undoubtedly have ramifications on the street price. History has demonstrated that thirdparty manufacturers always demand a profit, yet successful videogame consoles have to be sold at or below cost. Miller seems unconcerned, however. 'We want a high-volume consumer pricepoint, certainly,' he reveals, but offers only that 'we've learned the lessons of over-priced consoles and platforms.'

So who are these hardware partners? What brand name will gamers see stamped on Project X's casing? 'Our OEM [Original Equipment Manufacturer] partners, the people who will be building this product, and there are several, are among the top half dozen or so consumer electronics companies in the world,' is all that Miller will reveal. 'At this time they are increasing their support and commitment to us. They are paring down any work they may have been doing in similar areas, and as they are seeing our technology mature into its final form they are able to commit to it in an increasing degree.'

Miller certainly isn't scared of taking on Sony, Nintendo and Sega's next generation offerings. 'It's no secret that Sony, Sega and Nintendo will be coming out with next generation platforms,' he concedes. 'But our partners would not be signing up with us if they did not believe that we could compete with or even beat them. A broad-brush summary of our position is that we have the technology, we have the people, we have the partners, and we have the financial strength to make this happen.'

In fact, it seems likely that by launching in late 1998, the timing of Project X's debut will give it at least a two-year jump on Sony and Nintendo's next machines – a move that could prove crucial to its long-term viability. 'That's a very smart speculation,' Miller acknowledges. 'I don't think anyone believes that Sony or Nintendo will come out with anything new before Christmas of 1999. They've got to milk their existing platforms for quite a bit longer yet.' And as for competition from Sega, Miller isn't threatened. 'We all know what Sega's new platform is,' he claims, 'and it's hard to see how it can be competitive with what we are doing.'

Designing a competitive next generation console and optimising it for mass construction within a constrictive time frame is no small task in itself – a lesson Sega learned to its cost with the Saturn farrago – but Miller and his team have yet more hurdles to vault. 'VM Labs is three years old,' says Miller, 'and a good part of this time has gone into developing the core technology and this new graphics engine. But an even more substantial part of our effort has been on building a platform and a development system. We're not just building a graphics engine that goes in the middle of some manufacturer's box.' And this commitment to providing the whole package means it's time to start spreading the word to the games community and touting Project X to game developers.

A hand-picked selection of 'prominent' game developers are already 'very excited' about Project X. Development kits are in the field and Project X versions of 'key titles' are underway. 'But we're not taking a Trip Hawkins approach,' cautions Lefevre. 'We're being very choosy about who we're working with. We're paying a lot of attention and providing a lot of support and resources to these key developers. Early next year, when we have a handover development system and more of a support organisation internally, we will be able to broaden it.' But Miller concludes that, for the moment at least, their approach is geared towards 'quality not quantity.'

Certainly, and perhaps after Atari's shambolic handling of Jaguar, VM Labs is keen to stress that Project X will not fail due to a lack of planning or development support. 'This attitude is demonstrated by Bill Rehbock and Greg LeBeck joining us,' says Lefevre. 'Our bigger focus now is on properly supporting the interactive software community, and helping them to get the most out of our platform.'

Rehbock himself backs up this claim, citing VM Labs' development support as one of the reasons he quit Sony to sign up. 'I don't think the team at VM Labs has left a stone unturned with regard to development tools,' he reckons. 'Having worked at Sony, I'm used to good tools. But the guys at VM Labs hail from all facets of the gaming industry and have written tools from a game programmer's perspective.

'The teams we've put together at Sony, while they offered the best support around, simply weren't gamers,' he concludes. It would seem that the first shot of the next generation hardware wars has just been fired... **E**





More demos from the mind of Minter and the hardware of VM Labs. It will need more than psychedelic fur to get N64 owners salivating

company has decided to cease selling products under that name. All new 3DO titles will be released under the names of the group that created them. Thus Cyclone Studios (progenitors of *Uprising*), New World Computing, and a third, as-yet-unnamed division will become fully fledged, high street brands. However, 3DO will remain as the umbrella heading for the group.

Goemon set to be UK gamers' PAL

Ditching the game's ponderous US tag 'Legend of the Mystical Ninja', Konami UK has confirmed that *Goemon* is headed for PAL N64 machines. The 128Mbit cart will arrive in early '98, and Japanese character names and songs have been retained, with English subtitles, in order to maintain the feel of the original.

Acclaim's ups and touchdowns

Following a recent rough patch for Acclaim's stock, which saw it halve in value within two weeks, the company has received some good news: its N64 title *NFL Quarterback Club '98* has topped the retail charts in the US. Senior buyers in the US divisions have confirmed placing re-orders for the title within days of its release.

Copycats cut out

Striking a major blow in its battle against piracy, Nintendo of America has settled its case against the Game City, a US distributor of both the Game Doctor and V Doctor 64 copying devices. As part of the deal, Game City had to hand over $100,000 to NOA and agree to a permanent injunction against retailing the two units.

continued

PUBLISHERS MAKE READY FOR CHRISTMAS SHOWDOWN

The European videogames industry is set for one of the most savagely competitive festive seasons in many years. With the PlayStation going from strength to strength, the N64 gradually increasing its stake in the western market, and the PC tempting ever more families to enter the 'multimedia revolution', there will be three healthy formats and hundreds of games fighting for retail shelf space in the run up to Christmas. For its part, Sega is determined to see the Saturn off with a bang rather than a whimper; it too has a strong line-up of titles waiting to become stocking fodder.

Predictably enough, sequels and racing games (or better still, sequels to racing games) make up a bulk of the products scrambling for attention. In the first category, Core's much-anticipated PlayStation and PC title *Tomb Raider 2* is almost a dead cert for the Christmas number one slot, with a marvellous looking *Quake 2* set to follow closely in second. Also looking for a healthy slab of the yuletide sales, though, will be LucasArts' *Monkey Island 3* and Gremlin's sequel to *Actua Soccer*. On the periphery, EA is proffering little more than the disappointing *Nuclear Strike*, while Namco is ready to eject *Ace Combat 2*.

As for racing games, the scene is similarly crowded. Best of a varied bunch are *Sonic R* and the fantastic *Diddy Kong Racing* (which both employ arcade adventure elements to spice up the genre), along with Virgin's *Screamer Rally* and Ocean's multifarious PlayStation effort, *Total Drivin'*. Beneath them, a plethora of average-to-promising titles are lining up on the starting grid – the N64 gets *Top Gear Rally* and *Extreme G*, the PlayStation finally receives a conversion of the storming 3Dfx showcase *Moto Racer*, and EA has *Test Drive 4* in store for both the PlayStation and the PC. And that's not all, of course; Ubi Soft's *F1 Pole Position* (N64) and Psygnosis' *Manx TT* (PC) are also ready to vie for a position.

Elsewhere, that old favourite, the platformer, seems to be in vogue again. *Croc* – already selling extremely well on the PlayStation – is slated for a Saturn release in November, while Konami's terrific *Castlevania*, EA's risible *Lost World* and Ocean's much-hyped *Jersey Devil* will all be competing for favour on Sony's machine. Not to be left out, however, the N64 has a few unusual suspects including the excellent *Mischief Makers* (known in Japan as *Go Go Trouble Makers* – see **E**48) and the eccentric *Chameleon Twist* (see p48).

And yes, platform sequels will also feature in the Christmas software crowds. BMG Interactive's *Pandemonium 2* is already out there and selling in decent numbers, while *Crash Bandicoot 2*, looking uncomfortably similar to its precursor, will follow it soon.

Other key genres are also accounted for. Beat 'em ups competing for attention this year include Interplay's unusual, though distinctly tawdry, *Clay Fighter 63 1/3* and the Ocean-published *Fighter's Destiny* (developed by Imagineer), both on the N64. Ocean, incidentally, is also unleashing the painfully derivative *Soul Blade* wannabe *Dynasty Warriors* for the PlayStation. Certain to beat all of these, however, is Capcom's recently released *Street Fighter EX Plus Alpha* – a hugely addictive, visually impressive and thoroughly playable







***Tomb Raider 2* (top), *Diddy Kong Racing* (left) and *Sonic R* (above) are just three of the A-list releases being groomed for chart success during the festive season**

addition to an what has become one of videogaming's greatest series.

Firstperson shooters look to be more healthily represented. *Quake 2* and Rare's essential Bond adventure *GoldenEye* sit comfortably at the top of the heap, followed by a duly impressive PC conversion of *Turok*, and creditable Saturn translations of both *Quake* and *Duke Nukem 3D*. No doubt 'better late than never' is the reaction of Saturn owners everywhere. Mention should also go to a few 'on rails' contenders, including Namco's masterful bullet-fest *Time Crisis*, Konami's *Legal Enforcers* and Gremlin's *Judge Dredd* which may suffer in such esteemed company.

As usual, original games are few and far between, but at least they're kicking about. Psygnosis, for example, is relying

continued

Konami goes to California

Following the trend set by Square, which recently established a development base in Hawaii, Konami has confirmed that it too is heading west. While Konami's US operations centre will remain in Buffalo Grove, Illinois, the new team will be located in San Jose, California. Product isn't expected from the studio before late '98.

Ultima ultimatum

The final release of Origin Systems' epic *Ultimo Online* has had a mixed reception from gamers. In a striking demonstration of the power of the system, hundreds of players (led by one Mohdri Dragon) gathered around a castle in the game, got their characters drunk, and started shouting endlessly. The purpose of all of this was to register their dissatisfaction with certain (unspecified) aspects of the title. Disconcertingly, Mohdri Dragon's real-life alter ego received death threats from another player, which were convincing enough to cause him to try and cancel the event. **Edge** will be watching for developments closely, and reviewing *Ultimo Online* next issue.

Sony revamps Japanese PlayStation

Owners of import PlayStations will probably gloat that the European version of the machine was lumbered with an unappealing, grey options screen, rather than the colourful one built into theirs. Now, Sony in Japan has multiplied the jealousy factor by releasing a new PlayStation model which has a built-in 'Sound Scope', similar





While the N64 will see clinkers like *Clayfighter 63 1/3* on the run up to Christmas, *GoldenEye* (above) is a joy. *FIFA: Road to the World Cup* (left) may surprise, too

almost entirely on fresh titles this Christmas, including the offbeat *Overboard*, the epic flight shooter *G-Police*, and the visually accomplished (though imperfectly executed) *Colony Wars*. Furthermore, BMG will be wheeling out *GTA* (great on the PC, though **Edge** reserves judgment on the PlayStation version for the moment) at the end of November, and Ocean is expecting great things of space shoot 'em up *I War* (see **E**52). Gremlin's PC arcade adventure *Men in Black* and Virgin's point-and-click *Blade Runner* are also likely to make a mark on the seasonal charts, if only for their lucrative film licences.

But the battle for Christmas supremacy isn't confined to software publishers. Nintendo has brought the price of the N64 down to an extremely competitive £99 and slimmed the RRPs of titles such as *Diddy Kong Racing*, *GoldenEye* and *Super Mario 64* down to a more respectable £49, in line with CD-ROM software. Sony immediately replied by packing out the existing £129 PlayStation box with two controllers and a memory card. Both companies know this is an important three months for their machines: 1997 could well be the PlayStation's penultimate Winter as a lead contender before its sequel takes up the baton, while Nintendo must seize every opportunity to secure a wide N64 user base to fend off competition from both the PlayStation 2 and Sega's follow up to the Saturn.

Unfortunately, Nintendo seems to have picked up some bad habits from its rivals. After six months of excellent releases marred only by a smattering of duds, the company now seems to have plumped for a shelf-packing tactic familiar to CD-ROM console owners. This winter, for every *GoldenEye* and *Diddy Kong Racing*, there's a *Dark Rift* and a *Clay Fighter* waiting to bring the machine into disrepute. The quality of software was bound to suffer once Nintendo opened its arms wider, but this haphazard line-up will not please N64 owners.

Overall, things look promising for the industry in general. The massive selection of good titles competing for space hints at an industry undergoing a renaissance – and a market recovering completely from the post-16bit slump it fell into three years ago. If the quality so evident in titles such as *GoldenEye*, *Resident Evil 2* and *Grand Theft Auto* can be maintained throughout '98, it could be another vintage year for gamers. **E**







Three strong titles, three strong formats, three very different styles (from top): *Quake 2* (PC), *Mischief Makers* (Nintendo 64), and *G-Police* (PlayStation)

to the Psygnosis software bundled with the first batch of European PlayStations. Adding insult to injury, the unit is supplied with a dual-shock analogue controller, while the overall price drops from ¥19,800 (£95) to ¥18,000 (£86).

Nintendo up, Sega down, Sony stable

Thanks to the ageing Game Boy continuing to sell well (especially in Japan, where its popularity was boosted by the success of *Pocket Monsters*), Nintendo is set to post healthy profits for the '97/'98 trading period. Analysts are predicting the company will net profits of ¥67 billion (£318 million), up ¥7 billion (£33 million) on original forecasts. Despite the Nintendo 64 performing poorly in its home market, buoyant sales of the console in the US and Europe have also contributed to Nintendo's profits.

Sega, however, is starting to suffer as a result of diminishing interest in the Saturn. Profit gains made by Sega's arcade division are apparently being eradicated by losses incurred from the home sector – which should point to Dural, the Saturn's proposed successor, being released on a sooner rather than later basis.

Perhaps more surprising is the cautious welcome Japanese business analysts have given to Sony's announcement of record profits. Apparently, financial experts are concerned that Sony's recent strong growth – part aided by the PlayStation – is unsustainable. Seems as if there's no pleasing some people...

continued

N64 titles at SW'97

Ascii
Aero Gauge
Asmik
Virtual Pro-Wrestling
Athena
Pro Mah Jong 64
Atlus
Snobo Kids
Bandai
Everyone's Tamagotchi World
Banpresto Video System
Super Robot Spirits
Bottom Up
Sumo 64
Imagineer
Kiratto Kaiketsui 64
Detective Group
Pro Baseball King 2
Sim City 2000
Fighting Cup
Quest 64
Snow Speeder
Culture Brain
Art of Fighting Twin
Game Bank
Wayne Gretzky 3D Hockey
Hexen
Kotobuki Systems
Top Gear Rally
Konami
G.A.S.P!!
Hyper Olympic in Nagano 64
NBA In The Zone '98
Seta
Rev Limit
Wild Choppers
Morita Shogi 64
[plus two surprise titles]
Taito
Lamborghini 64
T&E Soft
Augusta Masters '98
Namco
Famista 64
Nihon System Supply
Chameleon Twist
Nintendo
Diddy Kong Racing
Yoshi's Story
Vertical Edge Snowboarding
Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time
Banjo & Kazooie's Big Adventure
F-Zero X
NBA Courtside
HudsonSoft
Dual Heroes
Denryu Iraira Bou (Electric Stick)
New Japan Pro Wrestling

Note: Some of the titles listed will be released in the west under slightly different names, and from alternative publishers. Certain games may have already been released in western markets, but will be new to Japan



NCL PREPARES SPACEWORLD LAUNCHPAD

Final details of NCL's grandslam N64 event, Nintendo Space World '97 (to use its new and full title), have come to light. True to form, the company has held back from showing major titles at any of the Summer's shows, its presence at ECTS being particularly weak.

Over 40 games have already been confirmed, with several more to be announced when the doors of Makuhari Messe, Japan's largest convention centre (and Space World's traditional venue) open. Among those expected to appear are some familiar names, including Rare's *Banjo-Kazooie* and even Seta's *Wild Choppers*, which at one time seemed destined to languish in development hell.

New firstparty titles include the previously unheralded *Vertical Edge Snowboarding* from the phenomenally talented team responsible for *WaveRace 64*. Though three thirdparty N64 snowboarding titles are already in development, *Vertical Edge* could be best of the lot if it can match the sublime quality of *WaveRace*. **Edge** will be interested to see if and how the makers of the other snowboarding titles – Boss Game Studios, Atlus and Imagineer – respond to NCL's game, the first to be published under the new Nintendo Sports banner.

The stars of Space World '97 will, however, be Nintendo of Japan's big three titles. Attendees should be treated to near-complete versions of *Yoshi's Story*, *F-Zero X* (the '64' suffix having been dropped), and one of the most anticipated titles in recent years, *Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*.

Zelda 64 will be released on a 256Mbit cartridge, making it the largest solid-state console game ever. This bulk is largely due to Nintendo's astute decision not to make it a 64DD-specific title. It is worth noting that with *Yoshi's Story* confirmed as a pre-Christmas release, it seems unlikely that neither *Zelda 64* nor *F-Zero X* will be released until early '98. N64 gamers should find solace in *Yoshi's Story*'s beautifully realised graphics and 'two-and-a-half-D' gameplay, which may yet redefine the public perception of what constitutes a 'next generation' title. Predictably, Bandai's *Everyone's Tamagotchi World*, a decidedly un-portable virtual pet, utilises less of the N64's power.

On the hardware front, there will be more definite news on the status – and possibly a launch – of the N64DD. Nintendo has decided to confuse the public (and industry) further by prefixing its moniker with an 'N', in order to associate the 64Mb disk drive more closely with the console base unit. Rumours of a modem being included in the unit persist, but Nintendo is expected to avoid such a costly feature.

Opinion remains divided over the N64DD's feasibility in both the long and short term, given the historical precedent for console add-ons to fail, and the fact that the N64 is still finding its feet in certain markets (including Japan). Only in America has the N64 enjoyed real success, with each new game topping both retail and rental charts. There is a distinct possibility that the N64DD may never be released in Europe, particularly given NCL's traditionally poor track record in supporting the PAL television standard.

Also set to make a Space World appearance are more than 20 new Game Boy titles, including *Donkey Kong Land 2*. The ageing handheld is still a big earner for Nintendo, with high sales of the Game Boy Pocket (largely driven by *Pocket Monster*) prompting an increase in production.

According to an interview with NCL's **Yoshio Hongo** in Japanese magazine *The 64 Dream*, there will also be 'one or two new Paks' at Space World, although he refused to be drawn on what form these would take. Hongo did confirm plans to produce an N64 printer that would run with the new *Mario Artist* painting software, though he conceded, 'It might be expensive.' If a printer were to be made, it would almost certainly be a Japan-only product, although **Edge** doubts that a large market exists even there.

With N64 fans becoming impatient both for software and for the N64DD, and with the PlayStation continuing to capture the public's imagination, Nintendo needs the Space World event to be a success. **Edge** will report on the show next issue. **E**

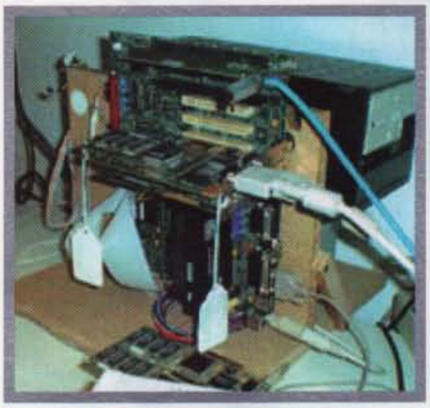
continued

Konami prepares something MSXtra
No sooner has Konami finalised details of a first 'Antiques MSX Collection Volume' for the PlayStation, than a second collection is announced. Due for release in early '98, ports of MSX versions of several popular arcade titles will be included, such as *Twin Bee*, *Super Cobra* and *Gradius 2*. While priced at reasonable ¥4,800 (£23), though, **Edge** would have preferred conversions of the original coin-ops, rather than the relatively low-rent MSX incarnations.

Gamers not Doomed after all
Recent testing carried out on *Doom* players bodes well for couch potato gamers. Instigated by Westminster University, the studies concluded that following a short spell playing id's shooter, participants produced extra anti-bodies. While some reduced stress, others fight sickness. Sadly, effects were found to wear off after an hour.

Government gives games go-ahead
Were it not for Congress keeping an eye on its cash levels, recent proposals to remove all games from US Government computers would have been put into effect. Only when it was pointed out that any savings made through increased productivity would be far outweighed by the cost of enforcing the ban was the plan dropped. Diane Whitlak of the American Federation of Government Employees defended their members. 'They don't sit around playing games

VOODOO MK2 TO OFFER TREBLE THE POWER OF MK1



3Dfx has confirmed the existence a new Voodoo chipset, set to appear sometime in Spring 1998. Plainly named Voodoo 2, the board will be around three times more powerful than the original. The consumer design will feature a 192bit architecture capable of shifting data at 2.2 Gigabytes per second.

Much of the increase in power can be attributed to the twin implementation of what 3Dfx refers to as 'Texelfx2' chips. Games such as *Quake* draw everything twice – once with textures, once with the lighting effects – with the two layers combined to make the final display. By using two processors the rendering can be completed in half the time, all of which results in *Quake* running at an unplayable 110 fps on a P233, using modified Voodoo 1 drivers.

D3D drivers for Voodoo 2 are not yet complete, but when finished will further boost its performance. Voodoo 2 boards will also be bridgeable (known as scanline interleaving, or SLI), allowing 384bit implementations for PC-based arcade titles. According to 3Dfx's Chris Kramer, Voodoo 2 games should include Voodoo 1 versions, although **Edge** feels that once designers grow accustomed to character models of 5,000 polygons it will be hard for them to cut back.

While 3Dfx is already claiming victory over the next wave of opposition, other companies have yet to play their hands – not least NEC/VideoLogic. That combo's new chipset, the basis of Sega's Dural console, is to be announced at Comdex.

Although the development of this next generation of PC accelerators was inevitable, it will be some time before Voodoo 2 – or its rivals – establish a foothold in the market. Meanwhile, PC owners should be content with the gamut of Voodoo 1 titles set to be released over the next six months.

VOODOO 2 SPECS

Performance

- Base chipset: 80 million bilinear-filtered, MIP mapped pixels/second fill rate
- 2 million triangles per second with real game triangles

3D rendering

- 16bit integer and floating-point Z-buffering with biasing
- Automatic hardware back-face culling
- Sub-pixel and sub-texel correction to 0.4x0.4 resolution
- Per-pixel and per-vertex atmospheric fog and haze effects simultaneous with alpha blending
- Polygon edge anti-aliasing

3D texture mapping

- Perspective correct (true divide-per-pixel) 3D texture mapping
- Full speed bilinear and trilinear filtering
- Texture compositing for multi-texture special effects
- Texture compression through narrow-channel YAB format

Memory

- 2-4 Mb of EDO DRAM frame buffer memory
- Up to 12Mb total texture memory

Display

- Resolutions up to 1024x768 with double and triple buffering

PERFORMANCE ANALYSER PROMISES PLAYSTATION POWER





***F1'97* and *Rapid Racer* are two titles that have benefited from the Performance Analyser**

One of the most pleasant surprises at this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo in Atlanta was the extent to which the PlayStation hardware is currently being pushed. Stand after stand boasted titles that, barely a year before, would have been thought beyond the ability of most developers. However, while many observers concluded that this forthcoming crop represented a level near the peak of the ageing platform's capabilities, Sony had other ideas. And at the Develop! conference in October its Computer Entertainment division showcased the latest weapon in its armoury: the Performance Analyser.

The Analyser, which comes as part of Sony's revamped developer kit, is essentially a board which is capable of capturing several 'frames' worth of bus information from a game that is run through it. 'The most important element is that it's non intrusive,' claims SCEE's manager of developer support & technology, **Paul Holman**. 'With some tools you've actually got to recompile your program and do special things to grab your information.

'Here you can take a black disc if you wanted to and grab the data, without the program really knowing about it, and then analyse that data. Also, the second most important thing is that it goes down to the bus level, so you see exactly how you're utilising the PlayStation's custom hardware, which portions of code are maybe not as thoroughly optimised as they could be and focus it exactly on where you can improve things.'

To date, Holman estimates that 20 games in the European and US markets respectively have benefited from using the Analyser, its use constrained by the fact that SCEE has only had one, hand-built model. Previously, companies would simply bring their almost complete code down to Sony for a half-day's analysis. Cursory though this may seem, it has had significant results.

'There are really two ways you can use it,' says Holman. 'Firstly you can improve your frame rate so you get that 30 or 60 frames per second, improving the speed and fluidity. Secondly you might realise that although you're quite happy running at 30 fps and in reality you can't really get much more out of the CPU, the GPU – the graphics chip – is actually being underutilised. From that you can actually put more detail into the graphics without it slowing on the screen and get a richer product. It allows you to move up to hi-res as well, and there are a couple of very successful games in Europe which have gone to hi-res directly as a result of using the Performance Analyser and being able to rejig their code.

Edge understands that *F1'97* was one of the titles to move to hi-res thanks to feedback from the Performance Analyser, while Holman also cites the internal projects *Porsche Challenge* and *Rapid Racer* as titles that have seen extensive benefits from performance analysis. Interest in the kit was, unsurprisingly, pronounced at the show. Wider availability should ensure that developers can use the kit throughout a title's development, and Sony is therefore confident that next year's games will see the PlayStation really pushed to its limits.

all day. Government employees are hard-working and very much try to get the job done.' No surprises there, then.

N64 finally gets Square treatment (almost)

A group of development staff at SquareSoft Seattle have decided to abandon the company and strike out on their own – with the express intention of creating RPGs for the Nintendo 64. Calling themselves Crave Entertainment, the team is headed up by the ex-president of SquareSoft's Los Angeles branch. Speaking to a leading N64 website after the move, a spokesman for Crave claimed that a minimum of four titles are underway, although further details were not forthcoming.

Namco announces new beat 'em up

Following its successive triumphs with the likes of the *Tekken* series and *Soul Edge*, Namco is working on a follow-up coin-op (right) whose working title is *New Weapon Fighting Game*. Little is yet known about the title, but Namco has confirmed that it is being put together by the *Tekken* and *Soul Edge* team.



(out there)

REPORTAGE FROM THE PERIPHERY OF THE VIDEOGAMES INDUSTRY

TTFN for BBFC?

The British Board of Film Classification is on the brink of burdening *GTA* with an 18 certificate. While **Edge** is surprised by such a high rating, given the game's relatively unrealistic depiction of adult themes, industry body ELSPA has other concerns.

Chief among ELSPA's complaints is the 2-3 month period the BBFC takes to rate title. In the fast-moving world of videogames, a three-month delay could prove disastrous for both a title and its developer. Major forthcoming titles affected include *Quake II*, *Mortal Kombat Trilogy* and *GTA*. *Postal* publisher Take 2 is so frustrated by the hold up that it is consulting its lawyers.

This collision between the 85-year-old BBFC and the spritely games industry is unfortunate. **Edge** hopes that a speedy solution can be found – before softcos are driven to force a conclusion.







Sony goes limited

While others have produced custom PlayStations in the past, few of Sony's grey boxes can claim a Paul Smith pedigree. Created for the launch of Psygnosis' troubled *F1'97*, both Smith's (far left) and Jordan Racing's (left) PlayStations were produced as ten limited editions. The units have been used as compo prizes, and will no doubt accumulate value in time.

Never mind the Seventh Guest...





This month, **Edge**'s attention was brought to bear on the *Daily Star*'s first PC title, *Love Bytes*. 'Stunning page three girl Jo Guest [left] has a new starring role – as the world's first virtual girlfriend,' the blurb begins. 'If you want to get anywhere with Jo, you're going to have to work out how to please her'.

While the Japanese have been producing this kind of tat for years, a quick visit to the MegaStar website confirms the depths this 'game' plumbs. Surely a product only for the terminally sad.

Licensed to ill-inform

Take arguably the greatest movie conversion there's ever been. Give it to a respected movie magazine and you'd expect a match made in heaven, yes? Not so it seems with *Empire*, which recently awarded two stars out of five to Rare's *GoldenEye*, dubbing it 'a standard testosterone-loaded *Doom* clone... very little to shout about'. After a bit of investigation **Edge** discovered that this isn't the first time the mag has slipped up like this. Horror classic *Resident Evil* was also knocked for being a '*Doom* clone' while more recently the magazine inadvertently bagged the *Blade Runner* world exclusive by 'reviewing' the demo shown at ECTS. Good to see that its performance is at least consistent, then.



EDGE SINGLES OUT THE WINNERS AND LOSERS IN THE INTERMINABLE BATTLE FOR VIDEOGAME CRED

(game on)

Sony's **Glasstron** TV unit. At last, a head-mounted display device that actually *works*. And works a bloody treat, too.

The prospect of a **snowboarding** game from NCL's *Wave Race 64* team – and snow-laden titles in general. Why bother freezing your arse off outside in the real stuff?

The **lava lamp** **Edge** recieved this month from BMG Interactive. Definitely one for the hotter end of the scale, especially after mistakenly being left on overnight. Doh.

Game ads on TV, for finally coming of age, chiefly thanks to THE's marvellous *Lylat Wars* short, and Sony and Simons Palmer for the innovative PlayStation Shapes campaign.

GoldenEye, for retailing at £37.97 (at least in branches of Toys 'R' Us). Was there ever such good-value gaming to be had on a Nintendo system? **Edge** thinks probably not.

GoldenEye, for retailing at £37.97 (at least in branches of Toys 'R' Us). Independent retailers must be having a hell of a time with consumers, in the face of chainstore ferocity.

The selectable **'breast inertia'** option in Saturn beat 'em up *Dead Or Alive*. If you thought fake nude Lara pics were sad, just wait till you see what *professionals* are capable of. Gah.

The prospect of another series of **'GamesMaster'**. When will TV companies – especially Hewland – realise that videogame TV does not have to be the sole preserve of under-12s?

Jeff Minter's **Online Ovine** demo for Project X. As hardware demos go, would gamers be more switched on by a giant stalking dinosaur or, well, Flossie the sheep? You decide.

Eidos, for canning the majority of its in-house developments. Just leaves *Deathtrap Dungeon* to carry the torch, then...

(game over)

nuMedia

A meeting point for media capitalising on the digital entertainment revolution

in association with ocean

No 21

CD-ROM

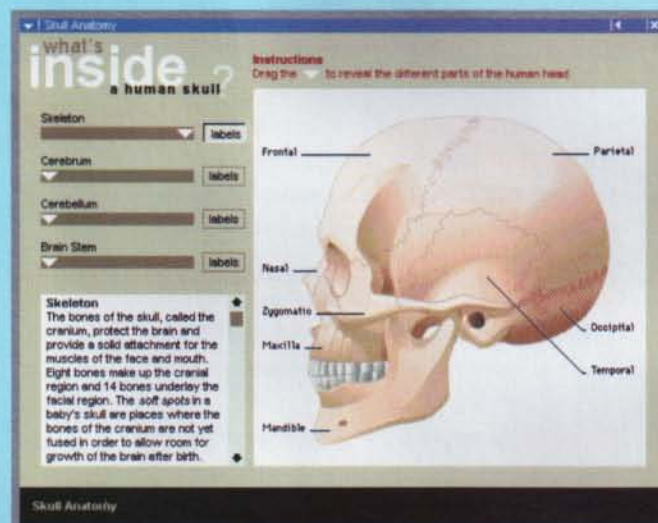
Microsoft Encarta 98

Just as its name gets longer every year, so *Encarta* gets bigger, beefier and more convoluted. This edition (on no fewer than three CDs) marks its fifth anniversary, and during that half decade, *Encarta* has become something of an institution. As ever, it's the most ambitious and without question the best multimedia encyclopedia on sale.

As well as containing more of what was in previous editions – that is, more text, video, and so on – there are, as is customary, a number of new features. These include virtual tours, which are QuickTime VR-style tours of selected subjects, including the Space Shuttle and Westminster Abbey, with relevant extra items of information which appear when you hit hot-spots; multimedia collages, which again take a subject (such as History of the Photograph), but this time let you explore it via a wider-than-the-screen collage of whatever media are relevant; and the Research Organiser, which is a digital folder into which you can clip the results of your trawls around the program and which is obviously aimed at students.

There's no doubt that *Encarta* has become the student's friend – and there have been muffled complaints from schools which have found their pupils responding to project assignments with identikit and obviously *Encarta*-derived efforts. But even non-students will find *Encarta 98 Deluxe* to be an unbelievably rich source of reference. Casual users will appreciate its hypertext cross-referencing which invariably means that if you start a trail of discovery relating to one subject, you invariably wind up learning about something totally different and seemingly unrelated.

The most surprising aspect of *Encarta*, though, and what makes this year's effort worth buying even if you're an existing Encartist, is the way in which it fights against the global trend for 'dumbing down'. Having long since passed the stage of substituting British for American content, UK localiser Websters has commissioned a large amount of brilliant and distinctly highbrow essays from some of the most eminent writers around. As a result, everyone, rather than just schoolkids with essays to write, can derive something useful from the CD-ROM. Beware, though: many of these essays aren't in the cheaper Standard Edition and, if you are upgrading from last year's model, make sure you get your £20 cash-back from Microsoft. Hey, Bill can live without it.







- Published by Microsoft
- £80
- Developed in-house
- Out now, PC

Music

Freek Funk
Luke Slater
Mute



Electronic experimentalist Luke Slater has obviously worked hard to create his futuristic vision of techno, and it is likely to challenge the tastes of techno purists everywhere. 'Freek Funk' voyages into outer space for its inspiration and returns with an amalgam of some of the weirdest and most progressive techno soundscapes yet. Weaving effortlessly through myriad styles, Slater blends breakbeats with funk, soul with blissed-out ambience, and turbo-nutter techno with… lots of bloody noise, frankly. Next millennium beats for budding space cadets.

Renaissance W'wide
Various
Passion



Dave Seaman and Robert Miles are the DJs piloting this slickly packaged compilation and both fortunately steer clear of their trademarked club styles in favour of a more eclectic selection. Seaman's mix is far more listenable, however, plotting a course through remixed pop material from the likes of Smoke City, Garbage and even Skunk Anansie, with PFM's shiny drum'n'bass remix of St Etienne's 'The Sea' the icing on the cake. Robert Miles, meanwhile, ditches his fluffy 'Children'-derived roots on CD two and gets all dark, psychedelic, and, well, bangin'. Who would have thought it?

Gadgets

Glasstron PLM-100 TV

Most of us can but dream about a 50-inch TV. The models currently on the market are all bulky rear-projection sets which cost the earth – Sony's top-end model, for example, clocks in at £100 per inch. Fancy, then, a gizmo which gives you the impression that you're watching such a large telly, where in fact you're looking at two tiny screens mere inches in front of your eyes? Well, the Sony Glasstron does just that.

Currently only available in Japan, this headset system operates in much the same way to those dreadful PC VR headsets which flopped so badly a couple of years ago. There are differences, though. For instance, the 'screens' you look at are of variable opacity, so as well as watching the seemingly 50-inch image in front of you, you can also see your immediate surroundings, should you wish. Ideal for making a cup of tea while not missing out on the footy, then.

The image quality through the Glasstron is surprisingly good, though the resolution isn't really up to the standard of a true 50-inch set. So watching movies and the like is good, though not ideal. Where it does come into its own, however, is when you're playing videogames through the thing, which can prove hugely exciting. The image quality isn't quite so important because the resolution's that much lower anyhow, and because the graphics are moving at speed. Here's hoping that Sony launches the Glasstron over here.

- PLM-100
- ¥88,000 (£420)
- Sony
- Out now in Japan



Glasstron PLM-100, Sony UK, tel: 0990 111999

CD-ROM

Weird

All the usual 'X-Files'-style material – the Yeti, UFOs, spontaneous combustion, you get the idea – can be found in this CD-ROM equivalent of *Old Moore's Almanac*. Mostly, we've seen this sort of stuff before. But, as is often the case with Macmillan's multimedia output, *Weird* is worth consideration thanks to excellent presentation and a praiseworthy format which steadfastly steers clear of the stereotypical.

Instead of just clicking on pictures or headings, *Weird* pitches you into the labyrinthine interior of a strange, futuristic building, which has been on the receiving end of some classy 3D rendering. As you pick your way through, you find displays on the walls; clicking on each one of these brings up a featurette covering some unexplained subject or other.

Interspersed with these are a number of puzzles which won't satisfy point-and-click devotees but are mildly diverting. The whole CD-ROM, in fact, is liberally sprinkled with little devices and twists which succeed in keeping your attention span from dwindling, which is just as things should be in a multimedia CD-ROM.

Weird couldn't be described as a classic, but it does stand head and shoulders above all other CD-ROMs which cover similar ground, and is a classic illustration of how multimedia has had to develop ever since people stopped buying CD-ROMs just because they were there. It will provide a treat for anyone you know who is obsessed with UFOs, the occult, conspiracy theories and anything that apparently exists outside of the laws of physics.

- Published by Macmillan Interactive
- £20
- Developed by Electric Sheep
- Out now, PC







Coming Up For Air
Bio.Com
Deepstar



This London duo's only previous outing involved remixing duties for Andrew Weatherall's Two Lone Swordsmen, and you can see why: the dubby, textured, submarine and vocal-free house inflections on 'Coming Up For Air' are on a similar tip to TLS's work. Dubbed-out breakbeats and joyously equine rhythm lines rub shoulders with evocative ambience and occasional darker moments. It won't appeal to those who like their music conventionally structured and vocal-led, but will be swallowed voraciously by those who follow the path of the Swordsmen.

Letters From The Jeste
The Timewriter
Plastic City Records



The Timewriter's debut is a tech-house tour de force, dripping with tunes and musicality, which often makes dancefloor sense but always remains warm, inviting and commercial. The Timewriter have two types of song: one which starts off like a four-to-the-floor stomper and mutates into a slinky house number, and one which starts all housey and hardens up as it goes along. Sprinkled on top are trancey, minimal, ironic female vocal samples, while Chicago-style inflections add a final touch of seasoning. Lush, pretty and dance-inducing, which is a fine achievement.

Gadgets

NS-7T Super Mini and MJ-L7 MiniDisc Recorder

The NS-7T supermini system comprises of a CD player, tuner, amp, cassette deck and MiniDisc recorder (the MJ-L7, which adds £200 to the standard £499 list price), together with a pair of diminutive speakers and a sub-woofer. And what strikes you immediately – even before you turn the thing on – is how fantastic it looks. This is quite possibly the best looking hi-fi under the £1,000 mark.

When you do get around to throwing the power switch, the sound it makes is pleasant in the extreme, and far 'bigger' than system's size would suggest. In terms of its stats it's also reasonably impressive, with 30 watts per channel into the front stereo pair of speakers, and 50 watts of oomph in the sub-woofer. So it should have no problems flooding medium-sized rooms with music. For the price, it's a fantastic system.

NS-7T and MJ-L7, Pioneer, tel: 01753 789789



- **NS-7T and MJ-L7**
- **£500 and £200**
- **Pioneer**
- **Available now**

Books

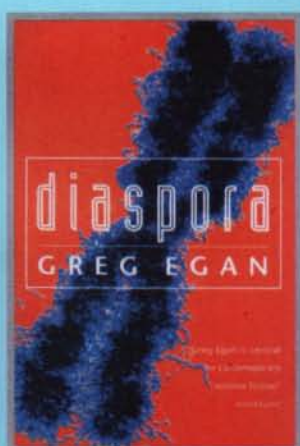
Diaspora

Quantum leaps of the imagination, complex ideas, Asimov-esque android distopias: the fact that Egan spends much of his time as a computer programmer will come as no surprise to anyone who reads 'Diaspora'.

Centuries into the future, the majority of human descendants now exist as disembodied super intelligent software contained in Polises. True organic humans do still exist, but these have been sidelined, nicknamed as Fleshers, and ranked little higher than Gleisners: robotic machines that Polis inhabitants can control to interact with the physical world.

This may sound weird, but Egan hasn't even started yet. Later, an astrophysical accident spurs the Polis citizens to escape to the stars, where they discover a fantastically developed alien culture. Here they are offered a safe habitat and protection from future acts of God.

There is a detailed glossary to accompany the book, and **Edge** suggests that it be read first. All but the most rock-hard SF obsessives are going to get lost anyway, but they might as well understand the basics.



- **Greg Egan**
- **Orion Publishing**
- **£10**
- **ISBN 1-85798-439-0**

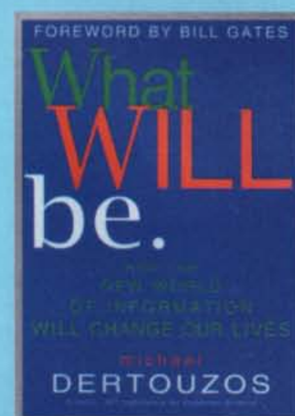
What Will Be

It has become clear over the last few years that the world renowned Massachussetts Institute of Technology is breeding just as many authors as it is brave scientific advances. The latest is Michael Dertouzos, who divides his take on the standard 'how information technology will change our lives' tome into three sections: 'Shaping the Future', 'How Your Life will Change' and 'Reuniting Technology and Humanity'. Weighty themes indeed.

At least 'What Will Be' is more accessible than most MIT literature. Throughout these three separate parts, Dertouzos discusses what he calls the Information Marketplace in a readable and entertaining way. Being an MIT prof, though, he never loses his authority and this is clearly the work of a man who is dealing with today, what many still believe to be science fiction.

Packed with insight, 'What Will Be' is required reading for anyone who wishes to see into the technological future that is rapidly approaching.

One question, however: does Bill Gates actually do anything other than write forewords for information technology books these days?



- **Michael Dertouzos**
- **Harper Collins**
- **£20**
- **ISBN 0-7499-1758-X**

Music

Far from the Madden
Chicane
Edel Records



Chicane straddles a divide between the commercial club-friendly 'Ibeefa' sound and the kind of blissed-out Balearic melodica usually found on Cafe Del Mar compilations. In fact, its most well-known tracks, the piano-led 'Offshore' and the dreamlike vocally tones of 'Sunstroke' are respective cases in point. Needless to say, both appear on the debut album more than once but are thankfully supported by some rather pleasant, if not entirely memorable, back-up. A set of designer chillout choons – don't be seen listening to them without a cool beer and a red sunset.

King Of The Beats
Various
Team



The official '97 Breakdance Championship album, 'King of the Beats' contains some the finest B-Boy anthems from two decades of hip-hop and funk. Afrika Bambaataa's 'What's the Name of This Nation? ...Zulu!', Eric B & Rakim's 'I Ain't No Joke', and Schooly D's 'Skool's Out' are just a handful of tracks included in this action-packed release.

As well as essential cuts, there's also a multimedia section which allows users to learn the moves, talk the talk, check out a selection of graffiti, and get insight from some of the masters of breakdancing. A great package.

netview

EDGE'S EXAMINATION OF THE INTERNET AND ONLINE GAMING SCENE

Sony rolls out big guns

By extraordinary coincidence, this month sees both Sony and Sega stepping up their online profile. Sony's contribution is *Tanarus*, its first multiplayer-only title (see **E**50).

A game of tank warfare, *Tanarus* sees players worldwide work together on both defence and offence. The battle arena is a distant planet whose surface is divided into distinct, diverse arenas, ranging from ruined cities to industrial wastelands. In addition to its collaborative gameplay, *Tanarus* boasts true day-and-night cycles, as well as different weather conditions, making for an ever-changing battlefield – a battlefield uncorrupted by computer-controlled vehicles and random events.

Rather than relying on the gaming networks of others, Sony will be running its own Internet server dedicated to *Tanarus*, which it claims can handle up to 10,000 players. Server-based software is less prone to the vagaries of lag then client-based games such as *Quake* – although others, including BT's Wireplay service, believe that even server-based Internet gaming is too compromised to compete with the bandwidth available to dedicated services.

At the time of writing, Tanarus is available for Beta download from http://www.tanarus.com





There are a choice of five tanks and more than 30 weapons in Sony's *Tanarus*. These shots are taken from the 3Dfx-accelerated version

Sega opens online shop

Losing the edge in the 32bit console market appears to have driven Sega into exploring a radical new avenue: a whole new economy.

Superficially, Sega's new HEAT.NET service is a fairly standard multiplayer gaming network, similar to the likes of Ten and MPlayer. But starting in January, HEAT.NET will also be host to *Ten6*, the first game to implement a revolutionary new payment system called Transactor.

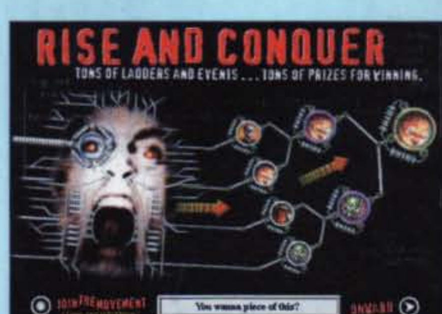
Transactor enables HEAT.NET to issue and monitor special objects within Sega's games. These LEDOs (Limited Edition Digital Objects) will form the cornerstone of Transactor-based games' revenue generation. In addition to buying the core game, players are invited to procure LEDOs, initially by purchasing upgrade packs. These will contain a random collection of LEDOs for a particular game. In a strategy game, for instance, players might receive new factory technologies or units, while in a firstperson shooter the packs might comprise extra weapons or armour.

Don't confuse these with add-on packs for *Quake* and its ilk. There will be a limited amount of LEDOs in circulation, and each will be unique in some way. A LEDO pack might include one of 10,000 M16s, or one of just 100 missile launchers. This ensures that players will be fighting for their hard-earned possessions as well as their easily bruised pride. It should prove to be an eagerly fought battle.

The Transactor system is clearly modelled on the collectable card game genre popularised by *Magic: The Gathering*. As in *Magic*, players will be able to trade LEDOs with other people and even sell them on the open market – and, should they run out of LEDOs, Sega will have more for them to buy. The cynical might observe that Sega could trickle LEDOs out of circulation (perhaps when players are killed by AI creatures, as happens in MUDs) and thus keep money flowing in.

While any service is entitled to make money, a more worrying possibility is that Sega's system could destroy the spirit of gaming. Cyberspace has always offered a level playing field, bar any disparities in modem speeds. The last thing many gamers would like to see is tooled-up toffs marching cluelessly into games cosily wrapped up in daddy's latest Christmas present. Though on second thoughts, many would jump at the chance to extract his wealth from him…

Heat is currently aimed at American players. For more details visit http://www.heat.net







HEAT.NET may boast a comprehensive cyberpunk looks, but at heart it's just another gaming network. Transactor technology looks set to change all that next year, however

B I G I N J A P A N

- THIS MONTH...
- TOURING SPECIAL
- VF MEETS TEKKEN
- D-VHS ARRIVES
- ARTIFICIAL EYES

SEGA IS PROVING THAT IT CAN GO ONE BETTER THAN NAMCO BY PRODUCING A COIN-OP FEATURING NOT ONE, BUT TWO FULL-SCALE TOURING CARS. ELSEWHERE, *VIRTUA FIGHTER* CHARACTERS MEET THOSE OF *TEKKEN* IN AN UNDERGROUND RELEASE, WHILE A NEW WAVE OF TECHNOLOGY PREPARES AN ASSAULT ON JAPANESE CONSUMERS

Sega Touring Car Championship gets special treatment

Sega's AM Annex has released a special cabinet for *Sega Touring Car* using real versions of two of the cars featured in the game: a Mercedes Benz C Class and an Alfa Romeo 155. Each vehicle is mounted on a hydraulics which simulate the car's on-screen movements. *Sega Touring Car Special* is presently displayed in Tokyo's Joypolis, Sega's theme park. One play lasts between three to eight minutes and costs ¥700 (£3.30). Blokes sad enough to try and impress their girlfriends can take them for a virtual ride for an extra ¥300 (£1.40). Whether any girl impressed by either of these rather mundane vehicles is worth taking out is open to debate.

Virtua Fighter takes on Tekken 2

Venturing into the darker areas of Tokyo's infamous Akihabara electronic goods district, it's possible to find some exotic and highly illegal versions of highly popular games. Very often, characters from one title are pitted against another game's protagonists. One such example is a Mega Drive version of *VF* vs *Tekken 2* (spelt 'Taken' in the game). Unsurprisingly, it features characters from both titles along with some *Fighting Vipers* characters thrown in for good measure. Although the moves remain very similar to the original versions, the gameplay, though enjoyable, does not. Most of these games are made in Taiwan or Hong Kong and sell in very small quantities to Japanese otaku. At present, these copies are limited to Mega Drive and Super Famicom owners, but some 32bit pirate titles are rumoured to be on the cards...

D-VHS players threaten DVD at Tokyo's Electronic Show

This year's Electronic Show took place in mid-November, offering a glimpse of the kind of products Japanese consumers already enjoy on a daily basis and the sort of things that with luck the rest of the world might get to use before the next millennium. As was the case last year, there was an abundance of DVD players – despite the fact that this new standard has yet to catch on in Japan (in Akihabara, most home DVD players can now be found at the discounted price of ¥30,000 (£140)). And now DVD faces competition from yet another contestant to enter the format war. Developed by Victor-JVC and introduced at the show, Digital VHS (D-VHS), allows higher quality recordings than the current VHS standard. Furthermore, D-VHS decks have the considerable advantage of being compatible with VHS and S-VHS. Both Panasonic and Victor-JVC unveiled their D-VHS players at the show.

Plasmatron televisions were also present in the form of some giant, high-quality screens (with prices to match), while the MiniDisc confirmed its strong position in the Japanese market with new compact models from Sony, Kenwood and Sharp, including a range of side-loading prototypes from the latter to be introduced next year. Other innovations came from Sony which, having found a new direction for this format, introduced the first digital camera to use a MiniDisc to store the shots. In computer storage terms, meanwhile, DVD-RAM caused much commotion.

Mitsubishi displays artificial retina interface

Disenchanted with joypads, Mitsubishi Electric Research Laboratories (MERL) has developed a new interface system which allows information to be fed to computers via visual input. The main module resembles a camera and is composed of a retina module and a realtime vision algorithm developed by various Mitsubishi companies. It detects a player's body movements and translates them into character actions on-screen – the required time for image acquisition, recognition and feedback to the game character is less than 16msec. The retina module consists of an artificial retina chip with an array of 32x32 pixel core circuits and a 16bit microcomputer. This artificial retina chip is a novel image sensor which realises the simultaneous functions of image acquisition and feature extraction, similar to the human eye's functioning. The module was demonstrated at the Electronic Show where it was possible to play *Decathlete* with players engaging in the 100m dash and long jump events. The running and jumping action was interpreted surprisingly efficiently and the events were enjoyable, although the ciggie habits of most journos in attendance impeded any chances of record-breaking times being set... **E**





DVD (above) and DVD-RAM players (right) were vying for attention with D-VHS at the Tokyo Electronic Show



Sega Touring Car Championship Special recently took pride of place at Tokyo's Joypolis. Using full-size cars, it has proved popular with yen-laden gamers



Mega Drive *Virtua Fighter vs Taken 2*: the ultimate in pirate console gaming?



Mitsubishi's artificial retina technology was demonstrated at the Tokyo Electronic Show with *Decathlete*. Its development will be worth monitoring



Tim Christian (left) and Chris Meredith contemplate Microprose's future following the GTI deal

AN AUDIENCE WITH... Microprose

The company with a gilt-edged back catalogue the envy of countless PC developers is about to be sold – to a relative newcomer. **Edge** spoke to the men in charge of its European arm about the future of the PC games market



Fresh from a visit to its San Francisco HQ, **Edge** journeyed to MicroProse's European outpost in exotic Chipping Sodbury, just outside Bristol. MicroProse's offices are situated next to a disused quarry and **Edge**'s taxi driver is having more than a few problems finding it. He stops to ask a passer-by for directions.

'D'you know where Pro Plus is, mate?'

'It's MicroProse.'

'Sorry, Micro Plus,' he offers. A complex set of instructions lead the taxi to an animal feed factory.

Eventually, **Edge** arrives at the bustling MicroProse office. The proposed takeover of the company by GT means European MD **Tim Christian**'s time is spent in meeting after meeting at the moment – the day before he was in France, in conference with Kalisto. But for now, he and European director of marketing **Chris Meredith** have taken time out to talk to **Edge** about the takeover, and the changes in both the company and the PC market in recent years.

Edge: What is the situation between MicroProse and GT?

Tim Christian: At the moment we're in that difficult intermediate period between the offer having been accepted, subject to shareholder approval, and shareholder approval itself. This takes place at a couple of extraordinary general meetings in the middle of December.

In the meantime, we're just talking to each other, working out plans for the future, finding out personnel strengths and weaknesses, that sort of stuff. Really, waiting for the deal to actually happen because so much of what we're planning is contingent on the deal being finalised.

Edge: So what are the benefits of the deal?

TC: Um... [clears throat] As I drop into techno-management speak... the big word 'synergy' comes out [Christian and Meredith both laugh]. Because GT is a relatively new company that has grown very rapidly, they have comparatively little in terms of development infrastructure, whereas we have five studios. So, one of the big synergies is



that we bring our internal development functions into GT's principally external development business. Additionally, we have a very strong European operation and theirs is younger. And in the US, GT is a very strong distributor and publisher, but a lot of it has got to be worked out. The deal came together quite quickly so a lot of the planning that might have gone on before – had this taken months and months to get to the offer stage – hasn't happened. It was literally a number of weeks.

Edge: How did the deal come about?

TC: They made an approach to us. Simple as that. MicroProse is a company that's been in a turnaround and it was always on the cards once the company became much stronger, in an industry that is consolidating, that it would be bought by another player. But it would be bought for its strengths rather than its weaknesses.

Edge: How does something like this affect the day-to-day running of the business?

TC: Um... the key phrase at the moment is 'business as usual' because obviously both companies have their biggest quarters of the year running into Christmas. So, we all smile and say business as usual but, of course, there's this big event hanging over you. But you can't let either company just go down the pan because you're concentrating on something else. You've got to carry on the best you can and still bring in the numbers.

Edge: Are you afraid for your jobs at all?

TC: I think so much of this still has to be finalised that it's still rather early to say who's going to be doing what – and to whom – three months down the line.

Edge: When Steve Race came in to head up MicroProse he canned a few projects immediately...

TC: Yeah, we went through a very, very rapid phase of refocussing the company, in particular the development organisation. We broke our business down into areas of the market that we wanted to be in, particularly genres like strategy, flight sims, driving sims, and action adventures. Then within those genres we had specific brands that we knew that we owned and were good at developing product for. Like the *Civilization* brand, the *Grand Prix* brand, like the *X-Com* brand, the *Star Trek* brand, etcetera, etcetera.

And once we've sieved and filtered this what dropped through was actually quite a clear product strategy and we've just kept that going over the past couple of years. Just kept very focussed on what we know we're good at instead 'Let's try this, try that, try something else', you know, throw some money against the wall and see if it sticks.



Edge: From what **Edge** saw at San Francisco there's a clear sense that you're going for branded products, licensed products and continuations of series. Is it because they are predictable performers?

TC: [Laughs] Yes and no. They are still only as good as the product itself. So even though, for example, we had a title recently like *Star Trek: Generations*, it didn't perform as well as we thought it was going to. Now, we do have pleasant surprises – *Grand Prix 2* has done well over a million units and no managing director in his right mind is going to predict that for a business plan.

'MICROPROSE HAS BEEN IN TURNAROUND. IT WAS ALWAYS ON THE CARDS THAT ONCE THE COMPANY BECAME MUCH STRONGER IT WOULD BE BOUGHT BY ANOTHER PLAYER'

The predictability of the business is not there because underlying everything is this immense organic growth anyway. You're still looking at 20-30% growth year on year.

Edge: Does being a PC-only developer insure you somewhat against this unpredictability of the market?

TC: There are greater elements of risk in the console ▶





business but that's largely because your cost of goods, ie buying PSX CDs or N64 cartridges, is much more expensive than putting together a PC CD-ROM package. So your risk lies in the inventory you have to buy.

Edge: Sales predictions have to be spot on then?

TC: Oh, yeah. Because if something dies on you and you're left with unsaleable inventory, that can very easily eat into your profits. And we've seen many companies do that in the past – Acclaim are the classic example, where they overstocked in a 16bit videogame market that was dropping rapidly. We've all learned from that.

Edge: With a more cautious, calculated approach to the market, does this mean that developers can't make successful pitches for 'uncommercial' games or products without brands or licences?

TC: No, it just means that we have to research those more closely. We do a lot more preproduction work than we used to. If a product concept comes along that's not one of our genres or doesn't fit with one of our brands then we look at it much more closely. It's very rare that you'll get a guy walk in through the door with an exercise book of ideas and we'll think, 'Yeah, we'll do that.' That doesn't happen any more.

Edge: Ten years ago, MicroProse was associated with simulations but now they're only a tiny part of the output...

'I THINK MARKETING IS FAR MORE IMPORTANT NOW. LOOK AT TOMB RAIDER. THE MARKETING NOWADAYS IS NOT SOMETHING THAT IS DONE AT THE LAST MINUTE, WHICH IT USED TO BE'

TC: Well, I think there has been a hiatus between sim product for us and part of that is due to the length of time it's taken to get *Falcon 4.0* off the ground. That's been a huge investment for us.

Edge: Yes, but is the flight sim market big enough to support that kind of development, though?

TC: I think so. Some flight sims are arguably niche product. I have a theory that the market resembles a fried egg. The yolk in the middle are the niche products that have always been there – hardcore gamers who know exactly what they want. Then there are the other products that break out of that, into the white of the egg, and those become the blockbuster products. And there's six to eight of those each year. You look at them. You've got *Command & Conquer*, *Doom*, *Grand Prix 2*, *Civ 2*, *Tomb Raider*...

Edge: What makes a game cross over then?

TC: I think it's all down to a mysterious alchemy of factors that we don't know enough about. Certainly it's the game. It's the nature of the game. I use the term 'mass-market appeal' advisedly, because I don't think PC CD-ROM entertainment is a mass market.

Edge: *GP2* shifted one-and-a-half million units. That's pretty big. Bigger than most album sales...

TC: Yeah, but that's one of the real breakout titles. And that's one of the biggest CD-ROM sellers of all time. 'White Christmas' or Diana's remembrance song it ain't.

Edge: Where does that lead you in terms of marketing because, clearly, the specialist press only reaches a small proportion of that audience?

Chris Meredith: I think marketing is far more important now. Look at *Tomb Raider*, which has touched on the lifestyle market in the coverage it's had. The marketing nowadays is not something that's done at the last minute. It used to be 'We're ready to ship the product, now let's do the marketing'. The marketing is now done nine, 12 months in advance – it's particularly important when you're building brands up or sustaining them, this has to be done carefully.

What you thrive on in this business is brand equity – the *Star Treks*, the *Grands Prix* and what have you. But essentially the thing that sells it through is whether the game is actually any good. The awareness is already out there because the brand is in the marketplace, but it's the game that'll make it a big seller or not.

Edge: So, how much is company now marketing-led, concerned with getting a game to market, and how it's received, rather than with the actual games themselves?

TC: Over the past two or three years the focus has changed completely from being a development-led company where, arguably, the developer guys would say, 'Okay, let's do such



and such now, such and such next. By the way, this game's ready, you'd better go out and market it'. Now we analyse what we think the market is telling us it wants and then we work with the development guys to say, 'Right, let's go and do this product two years hence and follow it up and follow it up and build those brands'. The focus has changed totally, it's gone through 180 degrees.

Edge: Is that any more reliable or is it just as risky as development-led? Because if you're saying '*Command & Conquer* style games are popular, let's do one in this brand. *Quake*-style games are popular, let's do one in this brand', isn't everyone else going to be doing the same?

TC: When there is a successful genre, like *Command & Conquer*, which leads to a whole spate of *C&C*-style games, then the market can't absorb them all. About a month ago, for example, in just one week four *C&C*-style games came out. And unfortunately we came out fifth. Maybe we came equal third in sales, but we certainly weren't first or second as that was fought out between *Total Annihilation* and *Dark Reign*. *Conquest Earth* and *Seventh Legion* were way, way down. The market couldn't absorb them all.

CM: They all hurt each other anyway. Nobody really benefited from that exercise.

Edge: So do you take a chance on creating an uncommercial game which will hopefully give you another brand or do you carry on with your established brands and genres?

TC: The safe money dictates that you stick with your genres and you extend your brands. But again, I use the word 'safe' advisedly – nothing's safe in this business. That does give you the occasional luxury of saying, 'Well, we don't usually do that type of title', or 'Wow, I've never seen anything like that before but if I can make it work, let's go with it'. We do that. Very recently, we've had a couple of titles from Kalisto. *Dark Earth* is not necessarily a MicroProse kind of title but it came to us just about complete. We felt we could do good numbers with it and that's now being borne out.

Edge: Is that the difference, for you, between in-house development which has to be secure and external development which you can pick up at a later date?

TC: That's right. Every software publisher is always on the look out for titles they can pick up at short notice to fill a hole in their own internally developed release schedule. And that's where you tend to move genres or take chances on something. Ultimately, I think you'll have much the same product creation models as film and music. For example, Paramount Pictures may only produce a dozen films internally but they'll be a distributor for many, many other films and that business model is exactly what we're moving to. We're already there in many ways and we'll continue to refine that over the years.

Edge: With all the development being led by marketing, how does that affect the games designers themselves? Are the more talented, more inspirational designers – the ones who are liable to give you the crossover hits – unhappy with that sort of bureaucracy?

CM: I don't know if it's bureaucracy. What we've got to do these days is maximise returns. The days have gone when it was a numbers game – put ten products into the marketplace and whatever sticks we'll get our revenue from. It's now far more about putting three quality products out, we'll market them properly, and we'll get the numbers from those three that we would have got from the ten before. What we're trying to do is minimise that risk and



make sure what we're putting into the market is going to realise our expectations.

Edge: But doesn't that also minimise innovation?

CM: One would hope not. We certainly don't want to stifle the beginning, the evolution, where it's actually created. And that's really, in essence, where a new game comes from. Personally speaking, I'm in conflict a bit with the brand route – 'There's your four genres, there's your 24 brands, mix 'n' match as you please but that's what you're stuck with' – because of the fact that, to a degree, that does stifle innovation. That's just the process of a business structure. But there has to be a point where things that take risks can come into the mix. I think that's the problem we have to face. No, not the problem, the opportunity.

Edge: In that case, it'll come around to independents versus in-house again, with independents doing all the innovation.

CM: Yeah, I think so. The innovation of new genres will come from the independents because the expertise you have in-house is focussed on the brand. They'll know the culture of the brand and if they're doing a flight sim or a strategy game in that brand, it's easy to apply.

Edge: So, you've still got to be open to approaches from the independents?

CM: Absolutely. But I just think that the amount of independents out there that have the time, the resources, and the ability are getting fewer and fewer all the time. Part of the rationalisation of this industry is squeezing them out to the point where you'll have five major players and it'll go full circle and they'll say, 'Okay, we can afford to fund small independents to try and get growth that way'. But, at the moment, we're all still fighting to get through this rationalisation phase...

Edge: Because the industry is still growing and the technology is still growing?

CM: Yes. If we were on a level playing field, if we were all developing for a Pentium 300 or for a console, if it was fixed, that would be fine. But we're not. Some developers are aiming high, some aren't. That's part of the difficulty as well, particularly in the PC market. That stabilisation will take a few years before we can all start pushing for the same level. It's all a bit speculative, really.



prescreen intro

A roll call of the newest arrivals in the world of videogaming

An icy collision course

Edge investigates genre becoming rapidly congested

Sliding onto gamers screens worldwide this Spring comes a veritable avalanche of snowboarding and skiing titles. Perhaps inspired by the upcoming Winter Olympics in their country, Japanese companies have gone into overdrive, with two main camps: Konami and Sega's Olympic event games, *Nagano Winter Olympics '98* and *Winter Heat* (see p40 and p117 respectively), and snowboarding titles. Only the good-looking, French-developed PlayStation game *Snow Racer* (working title) differs by offering both ski and board stages.

Almost unbelievably, N64 owners will soon have a choice of not one but four Japanese-sourced snowboarding games – including one from the *Wave Race 64* team. This game, *Vertical Edge Snowboarding*, should generate a fair amount of excitement, largely due to the pedigree of its predecessor. If it can create a snowy landscape as convincing as the seascapes of *Wave Race*, and offer similarly sublime control, Nintendo will have another classic on its hands. But with *Vertical Edge*'s rivals – Imagineer's *Snow Speeder*, Boss Game Studios' *Twisted Edge Snowboarding*, and Atlus' *Snobo Kids* – hitting the shelves around the same time, things could get messy.

On the PlayStation, after the success of the Sony-published *Cool Boarders*, it was inevitable that others would follow in its tracks. While poorly executed, *Cool Boarders* identified a previously untapped market, and because of that perhaps deserved to succeed. First forays into new genres rarely fulfil expectations, but that process is echoed in so many industries. However, with Sony releasing a sequel within nine months, the original *Cool Boarders* suddenly seems little more than a shameless cash-in. The excellent *Steep Slope Sliders*, just released for the Saturn in Japan, shows just how clumsy both of Sony's games really are.

It has to be said that given the length of time snowboarding has been popular, the videogames industry has been slow to react to this particular trend. But identifying and addressing specific cultural sectors such as snowboarding could be a major area for expansion for the games industry. The success of a relatively weak product such as *Cool Boarders* should be a marker for developers to think twice before serving up yet another derivative racing title. If only someone had told Boss, Imagineer and Atlus earlier...







PlayStation title *Snow Racer* (left) and Nintendo 64 game *Snow Speeder* (centre) will be going up against *Steep Slope Sliders* (right) on the Saturn. Gamers are in for a chilly early 1998...

Index

Edge's most wanted

The videogames making waves before their arrival



Legend of Zelda 64

(N64) Nintendo

One PR exec from a well-known Japanese game company has already planned a week off work to coincide with this game's release.



Resident Evil 2

(PS) Capcom

So it doesn't use totally realtime 3D. No matter – it positively drips with atmosphere, and the adversaries are the most gruesome ever seen.



Yoshi's Story

(N64) Nintendo

Could be a dreamlike interpretation of a 16bit classic or Miyamoto's first serving of pure eye candy. **Edge** expects the former, frankly.



Metal Gear Solid

(PS) Konami

Edge's recent trip to see the Konami team behind this strategic adventure revealed an awesome display of realtime 32bit action. Mind blowing.



GP Legends

(PC) Papyrus

Away from the fantasy-themed games such as *Rage Racer* are serious affairs such as this, offering serious drivers serious entertainment.

Prescreen Alphas

The latest shots from the latest games, including Core's Ninja, a Bomberman for the PlayStation, a revamped PC coin-op conversion from Sega, and – unbelievably – a respectable-looking FIFA game













First seen in **E**43, these new screenshots from *Ninja*, Core Design's next major PlayStation release, illustrate some of the non-human enemies that the main character will have to face, using a wide range of martial art skills. Note the variety of the backdrops against which fights are undertaken



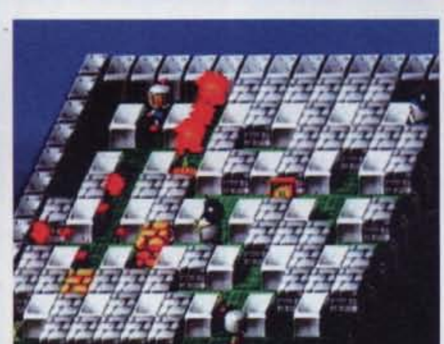


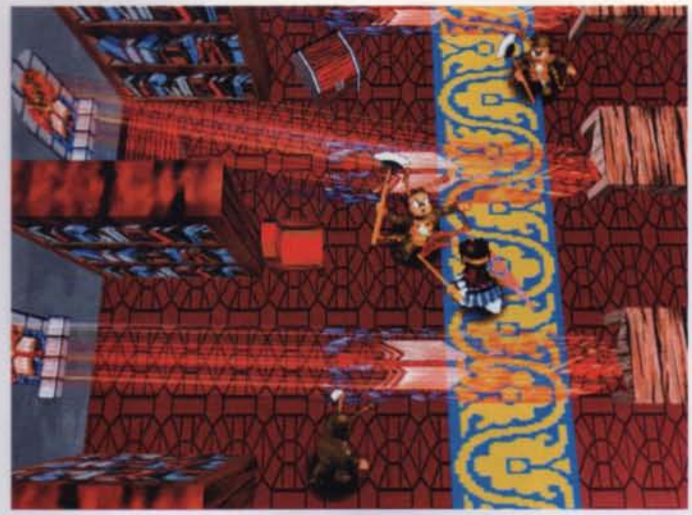




Bomberman World is the first PlayStation interpretation of the highly playable series. Although not as drastic an overhaul as *Baku Bomberman* on the N64, this latest version does adopt an unorthodox isometric view

















Monkey Hero, an overhead-viewed action-adventure title for the PC from BMG Interactive, takes inspiration from the cult TV series, 'Monkey'. Its graphics are surprisingly console-esque in style, with crisp, clean and colourful characters and backgrounds. Its gameplay apparently follows similar themes to the classic SNES title *Zelda: A Link to the Past*, which bodes exceptionally well











Considering the lack of fighting games available for the machine, the N64 is still not in a position to take on the *Tekkens* and *Virtua Fighters* of the console world. Imagineer's *Fighting Cup* is hoping to change matters. Published in Europe by Ocean, it features a novel point system rather than the usual energy bar. The game drew no small amount of attention at the recent Tokyo Game Show





Following the previous, disappointing release of the PC adaptation of *Sega Rally Championship*, Sega is having another attempt with this new D3D version, promising much-improved graphics and frame rate, bringing it more in line with Sega's excellent Saturn conversion. There are, however, no details concerning whether any new features, such as extra tracks, will accompany this release











As with the D3D *Sega Rally* update (above), this *Virtua Cop 2* conversion promises to be closer to the coin-guzzling arcade original. How it will play without a light gun accessory, however, is open to question. PC owners who may have played previous examples of the genre using a mouse have found these have a tendency to prove too easy to complete as a result of the immediacy of such devices

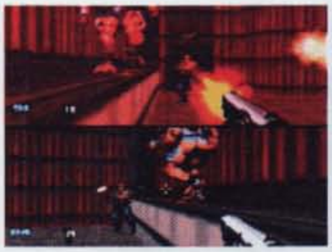








As Winter approaches, and more importantly, the Winter Olympics, an unsurprisingly large amount of snow-themed games have begun to rear their heads. French-developed *Snow Racer* (working title), to be published by Ocean, is one of the more promising examples of the PlayStation batch







After being successfully converted to just about every other format, it was only a matter of time before *Duke Nukem* made an appearance on Nintendo's 64bit machine. The oneplayer mode seems to make good use of the machine's graphical power (above), while the twoplayer co-operative mode or the multiplayer deathmatch sacrifice any sort of N64-specific visual excesses in favour of retaining a healthy frame rate








Revealed to **Edge** just prior to deadline, *FIFA: Road to the World Cup '98* looks like going a long way towards righting the wrongs of its predecessors. Initial impressions are of gameplay better than that of *Actua Soccer 2* with much attention paid to the game's visuals, as these N64 screens demonstrate. Motion capture is much improved, and night and weather effects are impressive

BANJO-KAZOOIE

RARE'S NEXT RELEASE DRAWS INSPIRATION FROM SOME OF THE COMPANY'S MORE POPULAR TITLES AND LOOKS SET TO CONTINUE ITS RECENT, SEEMINGLY ENDLESS STREAK OF HIT TITLES FOR THE NINTENDO 64

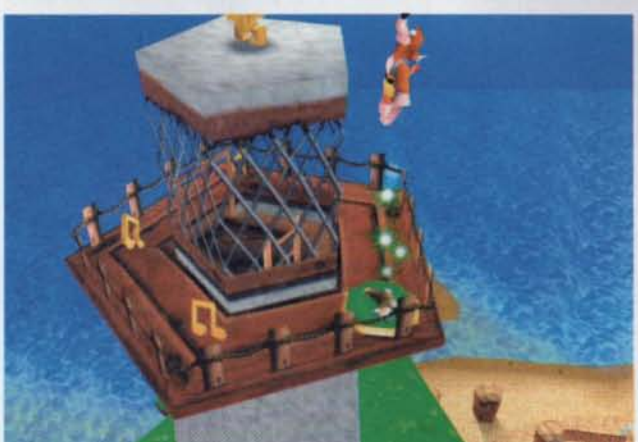








All of these in-game shots have been obtained from an SG workstation and benefit from a higher resolution than that of the finished Nintendo 64 game



During their travels, players will meet a wide variety of characters (top shots) as well as having to discover the game's secrets (above)

Format:	Nintendo 64
Publisher:	Rare
Developer:	In-house
Release:	March '98
Origin:	UK

Banjo Kazooie seems to be coming along in typically strong Rare form and right on schedule for its planned March release, as these latest screenshots will attest.

Interestingly, having recognised the indisputable fact that some of the world's best games emerge out of NCL's doors, Rare seems to be concentrating its efforts on producing quality software on par with the Japanese company. Indeed, with *Blast Corps*, *GoldenEye* and now *Diddy Kong Racing*, the only other company in the world seemingly able to match Rare's output is Nintendo itself. And just as *DKR* rivalled *Mario Kart 64* in many ways, most people will see *Banjo-Kazooie* as challenging *Super Mario 64*, an altogether different and far more difficult task. To do so, however, would be to detract from the fact that, in the light of early indications, *Banjo-Kazooie* appears to be a solid game in its own right. Of course, the action does takes place in a primary-coloured 3D environment with the obligatory secret







***Banjo-Kazooie* is huge, with many different locations facing players as they guide the amiable bear and his feathered companion through the game**



Throughout the game, Banjo meets witch doctors (above) or genies (centre) that will transform him into other creatures, such as an ant

IF ANY 'BORROWING' OF IDEAS HAS OCCURRED, THEN MOST OF THESE ELEMENTS COME FROM RARE'S OWN DONKEY KONG COUNTRY SERIES RATHER THAN MARIO

areas, objects to be collected and enemies to be defeated. However, if any 'borrowing' of ideas has occurred, then most of these elements have come from Rare's own *Donkey Kong Country* series rather than anything featuring an Italian plumber.

Indeed, *Banjo-Kazooie* uses a character swapping system seen in Rare's successful SNES titles, although this time around the differences between the two are significantly more pronounced. Players can alternate between Banjo the bear or Kazooie – a stork that appears to live in the former's rucksack, who, as a result of the length of his legs, can run faster than Banjo and scale mountains with ease. Kazooie can also use his wings underwater very efficiently. More importantly, he can fly – an essential gameplay facet.



The game features sub-games such as this, in which players control a crocodile

At present, all of the action takes place in very convincing levels, similar to those of *Super Mario 64*, the sections added since E3 being the most spectacular, with some of the best textured 3D yet seen on the N64.

When invited to play one of *Banjo-Kazooie*'s sub-games (which saw Banjo transformed into a small crocodile competing against another reptile with the aim of eating as many gopher-like creatures that popped their heads out of the ground as possible) **Edge** found the controls to be as intuitive and responsive as the N64's genre-redefining 3D platformer. Hopefully, the finished product will prove as enthralling, and further underline Rare's golden reputation.

QUAKE II

FOLLOWING A CHANGE OF PUBLISHER, THE DEPARTURE OF OF A VALUABLE MEMBER, AND THE ARRIVAL OF MUCH STRONGER COMPETITION, ID SOFTWARE IS BACK WITH THE ALL-NEW SEQUEL TO QUAKE





The environment features both translucent objects (top), and jagged-edged scenery design (above)



Some of the settings and creatures in *Quake II* are truly impressive, especially when generated with the assistance of a 3D card. Running in software still makes for a very playable game. Lighting plays a significant part in the quality of the visuals





Firing into the dark ably demonstrates the realtime lighting effects

Format:	PC
Publisher:	Activision
Developer:	id software
Release:	December
Origin:	US

Creator of the innovative titles *Wolfenstein*, *Doom*, *Doom II*, *Quake* and now *Quake II*, id software has faced the unenviable task of having to top successive, hyperbole-laden masterpieces. Public scrutiny – and anticipation – of its games is intense, to say the least.

Following the hectic action of *Doom II*, many devotees were disappointed by *Quake*'s singleplayer option, something id has sought to rectify in this sequel. In addition, the highly publicised departure of *Doom* co-creator Jon Romero occurred during the development of *Quake II*. And while *Quake* marked the start of a new phase in the development of the firstperson shooting game, the genre is now awash with rivals.

Jettisoning the medieval setting of the first game, *Quake II* adopts a futuristic scenario. The player controls an elite space marine pitched in a gargantuan battle against the evil Strogg race. Unfortunately for mankind, the Stroggs' favourite snack is human flesh, and so, in an unexpected twist, the marine's mission is to wipe them out. Such unexpurgated slaughter – combined with fantastically explorable level design – was the heart and soul of the *Doom* titles. *Quake II* now has missions set over several levels, with the player having to return to earlier, part-completed stages in order to advance through the game. In one section it is clear that the player needs to cross a raised drawbridge in order to complete the entire level, but it isn't until two stages later that the switch to lower it is discovered.





Multi-storey levels are very much the order of the day in *Quake II*'s structure





***Quake II* brims with lighting effects around explosions and gunfire, as well as the new flare gun. Accelerator owners will be pleased**






A special survival suit must be collected to pass through this large tank of toxic sludge

Another neat touch is finding hidden rooms and shortcuts by blasting at cracks in walls and floors, often revealing extra weapons.

To help with the elimination of the Strogg, id has included a wide selection of weaponry, some familiar, some new. The exclusion of *Quake*'s (in)famous nail gun will be a source of dismay for many fans, although they will find consolation in the new rail gun. Set to become a legend in its own right, the rail gun has the handy ability to shoot through (and kill) several enemies in a row, bullets only halting when they reach a wall. The remainder of the arsenal includes the shotgun, super shotgun, BFG and chain gun from earlier games, plus a rocket launcher, a hyper-blaster, machine gun, grenade launcher, and the promisingly named 'disintegrator'. In terms of how weapons behave in use, while many games now have guns which recoil; *Quake II*'s machine gun actually pushes the player off target, requiring short bursts of fire to achieve a kill.

As with the standard-laser-blaster with which the player begins the game, all the weapons make good use of *Quake II*'s new lighting effects. Shooting into a darkened chamber trails a blaze of light across the room. The flare gun (another new weapon), meanwhile, is used to illuminate darkened areas. The flares it projects also distract some of the game's less intelligent enemies, giving the player a chance to blow them away in the ensuing confusion. It's heartening to see a developer using modern graphical effects to enhance gameplay, rather than as simple eye candy. **Edge** hopes that other teams will take note of this and expand their ambitions beyond creating flickering lanterns.

While the 3Dfx version of *Quake II* is obviously something to behold, with added and improved lighting effects, plus an entirely different set of texture maps, the software version is also very playable. Running full-screen at 512x384 on a P200, the pace is still quick (as many would argue it should be). Unfortunately, both software and accelerated iterations feature the same weak death animations. Killing an enemy results in them rapidly dropping to the floor and flipping over, letting down the quality found in the rest of the game. (Certainly, by comparison to the spectacular enemy death throes evident in *Turok*, id's game certainly flails.)

So far over 300,000 eager PC users have downloaded the three-level 'Compatibility Test' version of *Quake II* via the Internet. With the 10Mb file taking nearly an hour to transfer using a 33.6 modem, the scale of id's reputation and popularity becomes clear.

Id must now demonstrate that it has the same level of skill in creating an enthralling oneplayer gaming environment as it has a multiplayer. It's not an easy test to be undertaking – expectancy alone would be enough to wear down many codeshops – and **Edge** avidly awaits the results.





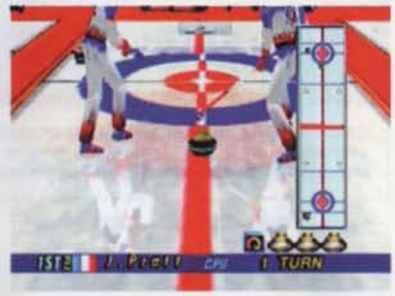
Disgustingly, terminating some of the enemies results in their carcasses being surrounded by a cloud of flies (top), replete with buzzing effects

NAGANO WINTER OLYMPICS '98

INTERNATIONAL TRACK & FIELD MAY HAVE RECENTLY BEEN RE-RELEASED AS A PLATINUM TITLE, BUT ITS THEME IS HARDLY IN KEEPING WITH RECENT TEMPERATURES – A FACTOR THAT KONAMI'S PSEUDO-SEQUEL LOOKS SET TO ADDRESS



Snowboarding was never this painless. Moves are pulled off by performing beat 'em up-style button and stick movements on the N64's controller









The N64's analogue controller is well employed in the bobsleigh event (above)

With last year's *International Track & Field*, Konami delivered a surprise. Few could have predicted that the simplistic, button-bashing gameplay of its precursors would stand up so well under a glossy coat of polygon graphics, yet the game shone. While its oneplayer mode lacked long-term appeal, the frantic multitap-compatible multiplayer action provided almost endless enjoyment, unsophisticated though it was.

Set for release on the Nintendo 64 and PlayStation, *Nagano Winter Olympics '98* is the latest addition to Konami's thoroughbred stable of sports titles. Although Epyx once famously realised the potential for Winter sports titles with the seminal *Winter Games*, Konami's *Nagano '98* is the first game of its type on 32bit. Built on the rock-steady foundations of *Track & Field*, the game has been developed independently for each of the two platforms. In a market swamped with PC-to-PlayStation ports, Konami's approach is unusual to say the least, the two development teams reportedly sharing nothing other than the game's name and motion-capture data. This has lead to two decidedly different products, each matching the popular perception of its host platform; graphically, the N64 version is far more colourful than the PlayStation's, for instance.

Konami's investment in two versions of what is essentially the same game might seem like overkill, were it not for the Nagano Olympics being a hometown gig.

Both versions feature 11 events, grouped

Format:	PlayStation/N64
Publisher:	Konami
Developer:	In-house
Release:	January
Origin:	Japan





These shots from the PlayStation version show impressive attention to detail – note the reflections of the skaters on the ice. Skating events can involve up to four players (right)



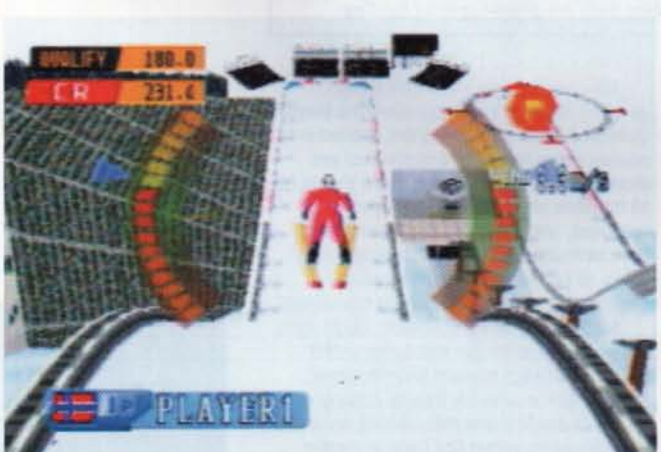


The N64 version (above, right) is significantly more colourful than its 32bit counterpart

into various categories: Alpine Skiing, Snowboarding, Speed Skating, Bobsleigh, Luge, Ski Jumping, and Curling.

The N64 version trades the PlayStation's Freestyle Skiing for Snowboarding Halfpipe, and swaps a downhill ski event for a ski jump, but otherwise the events featured are identical. Both support up to four simultaneous players, switching between one and four depending on the event.





Launching into the air for the ski jump (above) or snowboarding (top) events, PlayStation *Nagano* conveys a great sensation of movement

After a brief play through an early build of the game, **Edge** can report that *Nagano '98* brings the dismal quality of Sony's *Cool Boarders* into even sharper focus.

The original *Track & Field*'s combination of frantic and well-timed button tapping set a standard that athletics games have adhered to ever since, and for its latest athletics extravaganza Konami has taken that same basic control system and elaborated upon it, adding *Tekken*-style combination moves to certain events. Used for the snowboarding half-pipe on the N64 and the freestyle ski-jump on the PlayStation, where increasingly complicated patterns have to be entered to score points, the system works convincingly. Looking at the similarity in these events, **Edge** can't help wondering whether the teams have been working quite as separately as Konami claims.

The N64 version seems to have found the lure of the system's analogue stick irresistible, but the clash between smooth movements and hammering away on the buttons works to the game's advantage. One good example is the Luge event; players build up speed with buttons before taking off down the causeway, then subtly guiding their character down the chute.

With few companies challenging Konami's dominance of the athletics genre, it would have been easy for it to rush out a '*Track & Field*-on-ice' for the Nagano license. The development teams were in a difficult position – stick too close to *Track & Field* and risk making *Nagano* stale, or elaborate on the control system and jeopardise the immediacy that made *Track & Field* so appealing. Certainly, Konami's interpretation of curling is far too complicated for a rowdy, multiplayer, post-pub bash. Dedicated button-beaters will be pleased to note the game's interpretation of Speed Skating, but even this doesn't merely stick to the two-button approach of *Track & Field*'s 100 metres event.

Armchair athletes will be able to decide whether or not Konami's changes have been for the best in February.





The PlayStation ski hotdogging event is not easy, with complex combos (above)

ASSAULT KORPS

WHILE MUCH OF THE INDUSTRY ATTEMPTS TO REPLICATE COMMAND & CONQUER, CORROSIVE IS WORKING ON A MILITARY STRATEGY GAME WHOSE INFLUENCES COME IN THE FORM OF 'KELLY'S HEROES' AND 'THE A-TEAM'





Assault Korps **is filled with detail; soldiers can jump onto beds (top) and scientists flee in panic from oncoming soldiers (above)**





Sophisticated AI helps to control the Korps





Most maps employ multiple levels (above) to make the 'world' more interesting. Flat areas (left) are given depth by lighting

Format:	PlayStation/PC
Publisher:	TBC
Developer:	Corrosive
Release:	Early '98
Origin:	UK

It is very rare for a game to be born entirely out of the interests of its designers. However, with *Assault Korps* it is clear the obsessions of the team have been of paramount importance. As **Jon Cartwright** of Corrosive points out:

'Films and TV have certainly influenced the game – especially old war films. We've got enemy guys being blown out of guard towers with arms flailing madly, which is just classic 'A-Team' action. But of course in *Assault Korps* people and animals bleed a lot and die. No one just gets up, dusts themselves off and walks away...'

The plot, too, lifts ideas from every gung-ho '50s war film imaginable. The player controls a squad of commandos drafted in to counter the activities of a coalition of evil dictators known as the Kern. There should be 18 missions and several multiplayer scenarios, and these can involve anything from storming citadels to protecting supply trains, all played out through locations ranging from mountain castles to city streets.

Gameplay is similarly eclectic. Up to eight commandos can be put into action at the beginning of each mission and the player moves them around the map by clicking on individual soldiers and then clicking on where they should go, rather like *Cannon Fodder*. Meanwhile, with the other mouse button, there's a range of weapons to call upon



At certain points, a 1st person view is possible



Corrosive has taken care to exploit the many visual effects offered by graphics accelerator cards. Hence, bilinear filtering is in evidence throughout, and realtime lighting enlivens the dramatic explosions









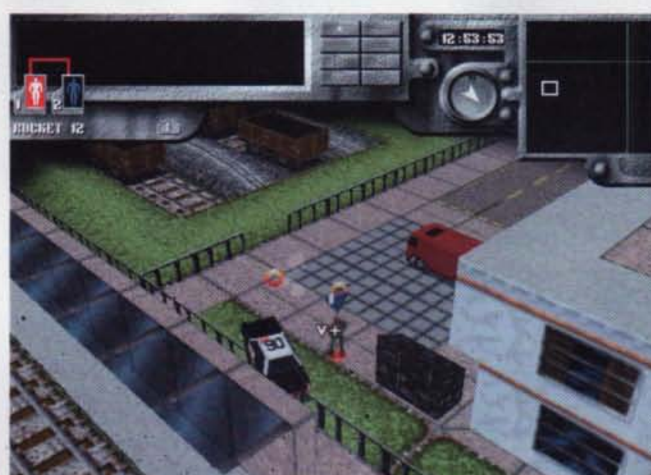
The map designers use proprietary tools to put together the various game objects

including uzi, flame thrower, sniper rifle, and proximity mine – a diversity no doubt borrowed from *Doom* and its many successors.

As with id, destruction and mayhem seem to be major team preoccupations. When an object (however big or small) explodes, it doesn't just disappear or go up in a modest explosion – doors fly off buildings, guard towers collapse to the earth, and tents rip apart, throwing the inhabitants into the air. When **Edge** visited the studio, one animator was working solely on sheep death animations (certain areas have flocks of them hanging about, and, when shot, they react in different ways depending on where they've been hit from). Goodness knows what they'll make of the game in Germany.

This intricate realism extends to enemy intelligence. Although soldiers do have a preset route to patrol, they also have eyes and ears: if they hear a noise or see a player running past, they'll investigate and give chase. The guards also have varying hearing and sight abilities, so the player can't easily test and then exploit their limitations. And if the player is crawling through the shadows, he is less likely to be spotted than if he's casually strolling through a well-lit courtyard.

There are still some areas in need of a polish, though. The game camera on the PC version remains too slow for modern tastes, and the PlayStation port is still in its elementary stages. However, if both can provide this real-world complexity and varied gameplay together with a smooth frame rate, *Assault Korps* has a bright future. (Well, unless the RSPCA gets wind of it.)









The camera can zoom in to view the action from dozens of different angles





As in *GTA*, players can get into any vehicle and drive it around the landscape. Police cars (top) and tanks (left) are among the options

SUPERBIKES

Blasting out from amongst the pack of car racing titles comes Superbikes, created in a land where God is blood red and powered by a V8 engine







Superbikes' **accelerated graphics look fantastic. The level of detail in the models is remarkable given that up to 30 bikes can be on screen at once**







Although perhaps not as exciting as moto cross racing, the action should still be full-on

Format:	PC
Publisher:	Virgin
Developer:	Milestone
Release:	January
Origin:	Italy

Following the success of *Screamer Rally* (see p107), Italian developer Milestone has decided to focus its considerable talents on translating the World Superbike Championship into game format. Although PC owners have already been able to enjoy *Moto Racer* this year, Milestone's coyly monikered *Superbikes* promises to redefine gamers' expectations of the two-wheeled racing genre.

While *Screamer Rally* neglected to include an official license for its five cars (although not to its detriment), *Superbikes* features a top-notch cast of machinery from luminaries including Ducati, Honda, Suzuki, Kawasaki and Yamaha. Thankfully, Milestone has ensured that – as in *Screamer Rally* – each vehicle offers a different handling response. Technical data from each bike's manufacturer has been incorporated into the game, which is unashamedly a simulation. Furthermore, in an obvious yet peculiarly rare (as far as other racing sims are concerned) attempt to attain a realistic effect, the team brought in professional motorcyclists to assess the game's handling.

In addition to the assorted machinery, *Superbikes* is also set to feature the full gamut of licensed riders from the Championship. While their names are not as familiar as the likes of Michael Schumacher, the inclusion of Carl Fogarty and Michael Doohan will surely be appreciated by the sport's aficionados. All 12 official Championship circuits are also destined for the final version of *Superbikes*, a more than acceptable quantity, particularly when compared to Sega's *Manx TT*.

As with *Screamer Rally*, Milestone's bike racer will support the increasingly popular 3Dfx chipset. With up to 30 opponents on track at any time, **Edge** cannot see how the

TECHNICAL DATA FROM EACH MANUFACTURER HAS BEEN INCORPORATED, AS HAS FEEDBACK FROM THE RIDERS IN AN OBVIOUS YET RARE MOVE TO ENSURE REALISM

software-rendered version will be able to maintain an acceptable frame rate.

Milestone has promised 'fast and fluid action', something that *Screamer Rally* has in abundance. **Edge** has yet to see *Superbikes* running at full-tilt, but first impressions are genuinely favourable.





With looks like this, ***Superbikes*** **is set to offer an intense experience**

BLOODY ROAR

Breaking away from its traditional output, HudsonSoft has created a visceral polygon fighting game targeted at leapfrogging Namco's seminal Tekken series





Activating 'Beast' mode is an eye-searing experience. Flashy visuals are very much the order of the day in *Bloody Roar*





***Bloody Roar*'s characters slip into something less comfortable – and their bestial alter egos tear into one another's flesh with teeth and claws**

In something of a departure from its usual output, HudsonSoft's newest title is a polygonal beat 'em up. Coming after a string of cute *Bomberman* games, *Bloody Roar* is a significant change of direction, featuring furious gameplay, copious spatterings of blood, and some seriously impressive lighting effects.

Bloody Roar displays HudsonSoft's usual professionalism, subverting several 3D fighting genre conventions with a bestial twist. Belying a thoroughly ordinary array of arenas and play modes, all eight characters can (shades of Sega's *Altered Beast*), under certain circumstances, transmute into bloodthirsty, ravenous beasts.

As in many modern beat 'em ups, charging up an energy bar by scoring successful hits opens up a new range of attacks. But rather than simply performing a new key sequence, the player can press the 'Beast' button. At this point the chosen protagonist mutates (in a spectacular flash of light) into their animal alter-ego, enabling them to perform more powerful attacks – and, using the Beast button, a new series of flesh-rending moves. Unsurprisingly, the action becomes substantially more bloody.

Game control is a mix of *Street Fighter*'s rolling key patterns for attacks and *Tekken*'s twin button presses for throws, making *Bloody Roar* instantly accessible even to the novice. Post-transformation, the characters can perform some spectacularly excessive set-piece throwing moves, and charging up the energy bar enables players to activate *Bloody Roar*'s 'Rave' mode, turbo-charging the viciousness of their attacks.





Learning combos is a matter of desire rather than necessity. Gameplay is exceptionally intuitive

Format:	PlayStation
Publisher:	VIE
Developer:	HudsonSoft
Release:	January
Origin:	Japan

This game is not, however, a one-trick horse. The fighting stages are edged with fencing, à la *Fighting Vipers*, which can be demolished by landing successive hits on opponents pinned up against them. Players can then be knocked out of the ring.

Also, characters can be set to appear in 'normal', 'big head', or 'kids' modes. Each of these is equally playable and – unusually – features its own texture maps. Other facets only become available once certain stages are complete, although they are tantalisingly listed with key words blanked out.

With the oneplayer mode packed out with the customary time attack, survival and practice modes, HudsonSoft has covered the necessary basics. However, it is the game's Beast mode that represents a fresh and exciting addition to the genre, and one that seems well worth waiting for.



The game's 'kids' mode features these chunky, eccentric characters

CHAMELEON TWIST

It's lip-smacking action all the way in another Mario-alike platformer for the N64. But can Nihon System Supply's innovative effort better Baku Bomberman?







In true Nintendo style, *Chameleon Twist* is packed with rich and colourful locations

With the era of the *Super Mario 64* clone in full swing on 32bit consoles, it's ambitious if not altogether surprising for them to begin to appear on Nintendo's own format. *Chameleon Twist*'s resemblance is made all the more obvious by the system's hardware anti-aliasing, which has imbued so many of its games with a unique (read 'often muddy') look.

Although its western release is being handled by Ocean, *Chameleon Twist* has been created in Japan by Nihon System Supply. Picking up the game after watching the painfully convoluted intro sequence (in which the player's chameleon is converted into a Bomberman-alike by the white rabbit from 'Alice in Wonderland'), those Japanese roots are immediately obvious – at least in character design terms, as the levels are surprisingly barren, although certain settings are pleasantly implemented, including one area featuring a tumbling waterfall.

Chameleon Twist's unique selling point is the main character's ability to deploy its extra-long tongue as a grappling hook (in a similar fashion to the character's arm in *Bionic Commando*), or as a tool to collect up enemies (as in *Yoshi's Island*). The chameleons can also use their tongues as poles on which to raise themselves onto high platforms. Licked-up baddies can be spat back out at their comrades, which is again reminiscent of *Yoshi's Island*.

In classic Japanese tradition, the early levels of *Chameleon Twist* offer little challenge, with more testing features gradually introduced as play progresses. Several platform game standards make an appearance, including floors that fall away as the player crosses them, a mining cart level, and end-of-level bosses. Nihon System has also included a training section in the game, although the need for it is questionable given the game's fairly relaxed difficulty curve.

Nihon System has also obliged players wishing to take advantage of the N64's four joypad ports, adding a fun multiplayer battle mode. Played as either time attack or combat modes and set over eight distinct stages, the game proves to have an intensity of action so often missing from modern-day titles. This multiplayer section could lift *Chameleon Twist* from the rack of 'also ran' to 'interesting'.

Confronting an N64-owning public hungry for new titles, *Chameleon Twist* will find itself head to head with *Bomberman 64* this Christmas in the UK, and in gameplay terms it should win – by a tongue.





The chameleon's tongue proves to be a handy tool – used for crossing gaps (top) or flipping onto ledges (above) in previously unimagined ways





The battle mode is great fun, featuring plenty of tongue-lashing action





Two platform game stalwarts: the minecart level and the crumbling walkway. It would seem certain 2D standards just refuse to die, no matter how many times they're used

Format:	N64
Publisher:	Ocean
Developer:	Nihon System
Release:	December
Origin:	Japan

ONE

Coming from little-known American Softworks Corporation, One could be what so many ex-16bit console gamers have been waiting for – a 3D shooter in the classic Contra vein



In one stage, the game's hero must be guided along these torturous ledges





Over the years, various genres have fallen in and out of fashion with developers and gamers. Chief among these is the lone-sole-against-everything shoot 'em up genre, once a burgeoning scene whose classics included *Commando*, *Ikari Warriors* and *Gunsmoke*.

Even modern flying shoot 'em ups (such as *Raiden*) are thin on the ground. Leaving aside Gremlin's mediocre *Loaded* series, the market would seem open for the taking. Enter American Softworks Corporation (ASC) and its new title, *One*.

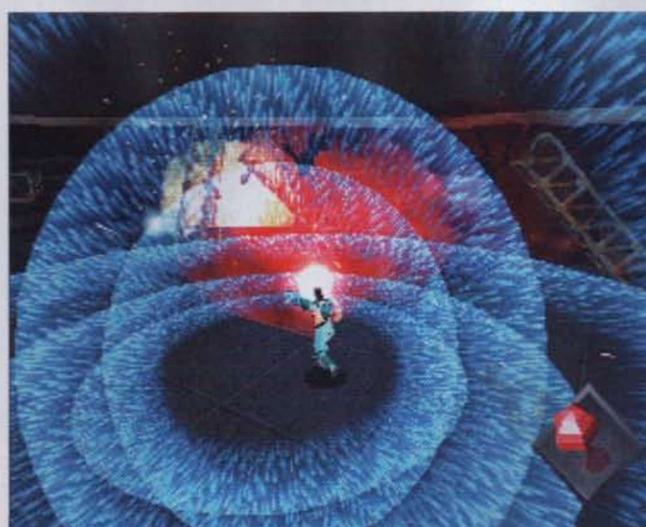
Taking control of the game's hero, John Cain, in a strange war-torn future, the player must tread carefully through a hostile world in search of his lost identity. And as if to underline its significant debt to the plot of the Arnold Schwarzenegger actioner 'Total Recall', the game begins with a highly cinematic chase down a gangway as the hero is pursued by a large spaceship. The visual choreography of this section is impressive, and sets the tone for the rest of the game.

Designed as a pure action title, *One* is a 3D interpretation of the run-and-shoot old masters, with the emphasis placed firmly on just those two aspects: running and shooting. **Luciano Manente**, associate producer on the game, claims, 'We were trying to give the player the same feeling as *Contra* or *Smash TV*, the same adrenaline rush.'

From what **Edge** has seen of the game so far, ASC could well have succeeded, coupling a frantic pace with basic puzzle solving, and the requisite massive explosions. Maintaining that pace is rewarded by an incremental upgrade to Cain's weapon (which, in a suitably sci-fi twist, has been grafted onto his left arm), rated in *One* as stages of 'Rage' which eventually can be unleashed in the form of a large psychokinetic explosion. Manente explains it succinctly: 'The more enemies you attack, the more Rage you get.'

Cain attacks with his laser, kicks and punches (which can be turbo-charged), and with various hidden devices. 'We have a few different weapons, though the flamethrower is the most popular because of what it does to the enemies,' says Manente. Igniting Cain's foes to great effect, the flamer is typical of *One*'s accomplished visuals.

As yet, *One* is not signed to a publisher – although EA and Sony, among others, are rumoured to be interested in the game. While ASC's track history is nothing to write home about (it designed the weak racer *Hardcore 4x4* for Gremlin), PlayStation owners appear to adore full-on action games, and *One* should do well for being exactly that.



After charging up their 'Rage' quotient to its maximum level, players can unleash this smart bomb, with appropriately devastating effects







***One* boasts some very cinematic locations, and features action to match Hollywood's finest**



A wide variety of large and fearsome bosses must be taken out

Format:	PlayStation
Publisher:	TBC
Developer:	ASC/Vis. Conc.
Release:	January
Origin:	US

MICROPROSE



THE **MICROPROSE** BRAND IS TO MANY PC OWNERS WHAT NINTENDO IS TO CONSOLE GAMERS: A MARK OF **QUALITY**. THE COMPANY



HAS BEEN AROUND FOR YEARS, AND HAS DELIVERED A SUCCESSION OF **AMBITIOUS** COMPUTER GAMING EXPERIENCES. NOW IT IS



PREPARING TO ENTER A **NEW ERA** FOLLOWING ITS PURCHASE BY GT INTERACTIVE. THE COMPANY HAS A TRULY **MASSIVE** CATALOGUE



OF FORTHCOMING SOFTWARE, HIGHLIGHTS OF WHICH **EDGE** RECENTLY WITNESSED DURING A JAUNT TO ITS HQ IN SAN FRANCISCO

A discreet little sign stands in a corridor on the second floor of MicroProse's HQ in Alameda, a quiet satellite city across the bay from San Francisco. The sign reads 'Editors' Day' and directs visitors into a meeting room filled with desks covered with PCs. Each machine runs one of MicroProse's latest crop of games, with someone from the team involved in the individual game's development hovering nearby.

Editors' days are a uniquely American phenomenon, a get-it-all-over-with, meet-the-press event for the coders and a bid for coverage from the publishers. They're the closest that the world of videogames journalism and promotion comes to the interview trawls that characterise movie coverage – the sort of occasion where Schwartzenegger sits in a hotel suite for three days, dispensing the same pre-programmed soundbites to a procession of hacks.

Thankfully, the discourse at the MicroProse's Editors' Day is more spontaneous, but in the time granted to each journalist it's often hard to reach firm conclusions on the state of play in any particular game's development. The MicroProse staffers seem willing, but everybody has one eye on the clock. An exception is the enthusiastic **Andy Davidson**, creator of *Worms*, a huge hit for Team 17, which is now releasing the sequel through MicroProse. Like **Edge**, Andy has flown over just to attend this function, so what does he make of it?

'Personally, I like meeting magazine people because you see so many games all the time, so it's good to see what your reaction is.' And reaction to *Worms 2* is good, something largely down to Davidson's single-mindedness, which is all the more impressive considering he's been working on *Worms*, first privately then professionally, for six years.

'Even when I was doing *Worms 1*,' he says, 'I had all these ideas mounting up which I didn't get time to implement. The aim with *Worms 2* was to come up with the best game I could possibly create without simply exploiting the original – if you bring out a game which doesn't add anything to the concept, people feel cheated and you'll alienate them.'

That said, *Worms 2* doesn't depart radically from the original's gameplay, it simply refines and expands elements that were already there in the first game. In short, it's a classic game sequel – a retread rather than a revamp. However, as *Worms* was so unusual (if not entirely original), Davidson can be forgiven for returning to a game he's still clearly passionate about. 'I just want to keep *Worms* as something different,' he states.







MicroProse's cautious gameplan comprises sequels to two classics of yesteryear, *Falcon* and *M1 Tank Platoon*, beautified with a few licks of paint from the 3Dfx brush

STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION – KLINGON HONOUR GUARD USES THE _UNREAL_ ENGINE TO POWER ITS 3D ROMP AROUND THE KLINGON EMPIRE. IT IS AN UNASHAMED _QUAKE_-ALIKE. SO WHAT DOES IT HAVE TO DISTINGUISH ITSELF FROM ITS PEERS? 'UH... GOOD QUESTION,' ANSWERS MICROPROSE TESTER KEN SCHMIDT



***Ultim@te Race Pro*, Microprose's new driving title from Kalisto, extends the original with new tracks and a spread of ambitious visual effects**

'Games are getting really boring. Everyone's doing different versions of other people's games – it's all narrowing down to *Quake*, *Command & Conquer* and racing games. There are very few worth playing.'

It's ironic that on the PC right next to the one Davidson is showcasing *Worms 2* on there sits one such appropriation of an existing concept. *MechCommander*, the latest in MicroProse's FASA-licenced *BattleTech* series, is another plough through the *Command & Conquer* furrow. To be fair, *MechCommander* isn't strictly a *C&C* clone, but its realtime tactical action certainly owes a debt to Westwood's classic. It's a genre that fits the robot-battling roleplayer well, though; the player controls a squad of 12 mechs over a 30 mission campaign, and each mech retains whatever damage it sustains in successive missions, as well as any items of equipment it manages to cannibalise from enemy mechs.

A more obvious take on someone else's game is *Star Trek: The Next Generation – Klingon Honour Guard*. Using the *Unreal* engine to power its 3D romp around the Klingon empire, *Honour Guard* is an unashamed *Quake*-alike. So what does it have to distinguish itself from every other ▶







***Star Trek: First Contact* (above) uses voxel technology, while *Birth Of The Federation* (left) is a turn-based title. The *X-Com* series goes *X-Wing* (below left)**

firstperson blaster out there, including its progenitor, *Unreal*? 'Uh... good question,' answers **Ken Schmidt**, the MicroProse tester charged with the task of demonstrating *Honour Guard* to the press.

'It's Star Trek,' he offers. 'There's so much out there in the Star Trek universe that you can use to make a game. Textures, weapons, characters... it's going to be bloody, hopefully. Paramount tends to be very tight on their Star Trek licences, saying "Okay, you can't have fleet officers running around killing races". But Klingons do that anyway, so that's why it's *Klingon Honour Guard*.'

The game slavishly follows the *Quake* template, right down to a choice of nine increasingly vicious weapons, and the presence of houses (teams) in the multiplayer version – 'kind of like the clans in *Quake*,' concedes Schmidt. Derivative it may be, but all the signs are that *Honour Guard* will offer Trekkers the same manner of licensed, quality fix that *Jedi Knight* gave to 'Star Wars' fans.

But *Honour Guard* isn't the only Star Trek title MicroProse has in development. It's not even the only one to use the *Unreal* engine. Enter *Star Trek: First Contact*, a licence of the recent movie, inspired by the film's plot rather than devoted to it and forced to take a different approach from *Honour Guard*. It's most obvious differentiation is at the visual level – *First Contact* uses voxels instead of polygons for the characters, apparently because a clause in the Paramount contract stipulates that the Trek actors control their own likenesses and, consequently, want their digital selves to look like them too. Whatever the reason, it does result in that trademark voxel problem – things don't look so good up close.

A far more serious influence Paramount exerted on *First Contact* was in its gameplay. Given the strict rules that Federation officers operate under in the TV series, there was no way that *First Contact* could be an all-guns-blazing shoot 'em up. But, as *First Contact*'s designer told **Edge**, 'Just because a game is in 3D doesn't mean the goal is to kill other people.'

'*First Contact* is not high action,' he adds. 'There are very rich research and strategy elements to it. It's just that the tactical interaction is from the firstperson point of view.' MicroProse will be hoping that this approach – more RPG than BFG – where players get to 'be' Picard and the other principals in the show, will appeal to a different kind of Trekker to *Honour Guard*. As should *Birth of the Federation*, a traditional (ie old-fashioned) space strategy game of planetary expansion.

As with *First Contact*, the licence has proved something of a constraint with play limited to the five 'Next Generation' races but set, incongruously, way before the series timeline. Right now, the designers are liaising with Paramount over just how to square the game with the 'Star Trek' universe – the most likely option is a convoluted scenario related to the





Team 17's *Worms* made a substantial contribution to MicroProse's coffers; it's now hoping *Addiction Pinball* and *Worms 2* follow the tradition







***Guardians: Agents of Justice* (left, above) is a rarity – it's unlicensed. *Ultimate Civ 2* (top left) adds multiplayer action to the strategy classic**



Magic: The Gathering of the Plainswalkers **melds the original and the ManaLink multiplayer expansion, adding 80 new cards to the game**



***Quake* clone *Klingon Honour Guard* casts the player as a brutal, ruthless Klingon warrior. The *Unreal* engine ensures a series of complex environments**

alien entity Q, Captain Picard's long-standing adversary in the series. Further development may swing it in a more promising direction, but so far this this turn-and-order-based strategy game looks more a makeweight than a top drawer effort.

Of all the games on show here at Alameda, the Star Trek titles most epitomise what the modern incarnation of MicroProse is all about: a big license, proven genres, reliable titles to build up what everybody around here refers to as 'brands'. Star Trek is just one of many bankable brands on show. MicroProse has ongoing relationship with the military simulation, represented here by three more branded sequels – the tech-heavy *Falcon 4.0*, *M1 Tank Platoon 2*, and a World War II sim, *European Air War*. Then there are other sequels: a *Magic:The Gathering* follow-up adding multiplayer options amongst other things; a new *X-Com* title that substitutes *X-Wing*-style 3D space combat for tactical wargaming yet retains the series' strategic framework; and the keenly awaited *Ultimate Civilization II*, which finally sees multiplayer action strapped onto the strategy classic's belly.

The general impression of the assembled products at the Editor's Day is that MicroProse is playing safe. There are no chancy experiments here. On the strength of the games on show one could be forgiven for thinking that the inspiration of the Sid Meier years has been dampened by perspiration. But that's to do the designers an injustice. The latest game in production, unveiled at the Editor's Day, is a licence of the forthcoming Paul Verhoeven film 'Starship Troopers' and shows just what the company's desire to blend established brands and genres can result in. Producer **Simon Ffinch** is the game's eager product champion.

'There are lots of scenes in the movie with just thousands of these giant bugs swarming over hills towards you. We're definitely aiming for the same kind of flavour. The engineers putting this together are busy now trying to pump as many polygons to the screen as possible.'

'THERE ARE A LOT OF SCENES IN THE FILM WITH JUST THOUSANDS OF THESE GIANT BUGS SWARMING OVER HILLS TOWARDS YOU. WE'RE DEFINITELY AIMING FOR THE SAME KIND OF FLAVOUR. THE ENGINEERS PUTTING THIS TOGETHER ARE BUSY NOW PUMPING AS MANY POLYGONS TO THE SCREEN AS POSSIBLE'

Verhoeven's blood'n'guts movie seems ideal game material and the thirdperson blasting offered by *Starship Troopers* looks to be a perfect match for its source. 'You'll be able to blast away hundreds of them at a time as you'll have extremely powerful weapons mounted on the suit,' Ffinch adds encouragingly. The build on show is early – the game is scheduled for release next Summer – but already its potential is clear, even if they are still finishing the engine. 'It's essentially an improvement upon the engine that was used for the *Top Gun* PlayStation game,' says Ffinch. 'We brushed it up a bit, put it on the PC and added a few new features.'

Edge's allotted time is almost complete before anyone mentions GT Interactive's (then impending) takeover of MicroProse. The design staff seem oblivious to it, intent only on servicing the short-term needs of the fact-hungry journalists milling around their PCs.

Some, like **William Denman**, MicroProse's North Carolina studio head, here showing *Ultimate Civ 2*, have seen it all before. 'I don't see a problem. In terms of creative direction, it'll be the same as it is now, very free, very open. I know people at Humongous and when they got bought out nobody had any heart attacks. They're happy, they're still doing the games they want to do.'

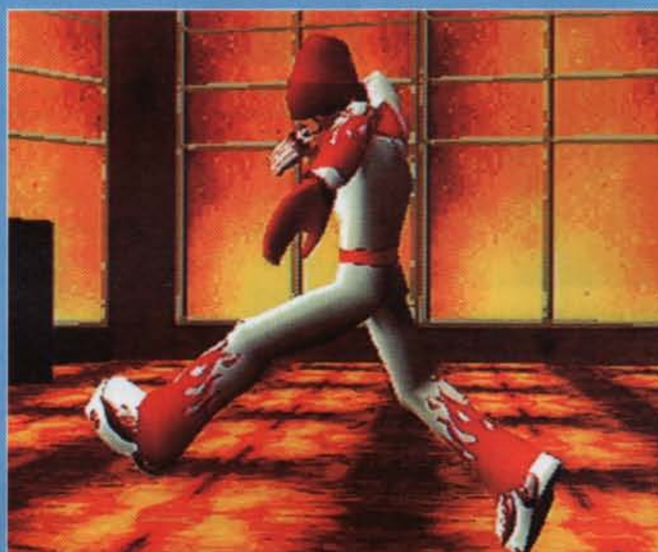
Putting a brave face on it? **Edge** can't help but feel that discretion is the watchword of the new model MicroProse. Be brave but, hey, let's be careful out there.



Based on Paul Verhoeven's forthcoming creature feature, *Starship Troopers* promises to deliver an orgy of thirdperson 3D blasting as players rise through the ranks to lead Earth's defence against invading aliens

BREAKING RULES

ENIX, A JAPANESE COMPANY BEST KNOWN FOR RPGS, IS LOOKING TO BROADEN ITS HORIZONS WITHIN AN EMERGING NEW CONSOLE GENRE







***Bust-a-Move* certainly has its own distinctive graphical approach. Enix's designers have really gone to town**



As with *PaRappa the Rapper*, the game prompts players with joypad instructions prior to each move



If any videogame development sector is going to throw up innovations then it is most commonly the UK or Japan, the latter generally being more offbeat in its approach. The latest proof of this pioneering attitude continues to be borne out in the form *Bust-a-Move*, which **Edge** recently had the privilege of sampling during a visit to Enix's Japanese HQ.

Not to be confused with the western version of *Puzzle Bobble*, this new game from developer Metro is a dance-themed affair in the style of *PaRappa the Rapper* (see boxout). Metro's past productions have been Japan-only releases, including certain sex-oriented titles – all rather different to the musical background of Masaya Matsuura, creator of *PaRappa*. According to **Noburo Shirasu**, the ten-strong team's designer, '*Bust-a-Move* initially featured some sexy polygon girls. Graphically we were already using motion-capture techniques to make characters dance.'

After Metro's president, Mr Kanemitsu, gave a presentation to Enix, the project's subject matter was given a substantial rethink before evolving into the more family-friendly product it is today.

'Mr Kanemitsu told us some of Metro's developers wanted to make a dancing game,' explains Enix producer **Yasuhito Watanabe**. We were very interested in such a game, so he promised to come back with one.'

Shirasu-san admits an admiration for 'the atmosphere of *Wipeout*,' which gives a pointer to the feel of *Bust-a-Move*'s music. Top Japanese dance label Avex DD was called in to provide music for the game, from hip-hop to house, albeit mimicked rather than licensed. By entering a string of key patterns, very much like fighting game combos, players will perform various dance-related contests. 'Basically you must catch the rhythm by entering the right commands, following the instructions displayed on the screen,' says Shirasu. 'In *Bust-a-Move* you will have to compete against the computer or another player. The game offers a





Players can elect to take on either CPU- or human-controlled dancers in what must rank as one of the most unusual PlayStation games to date. The popularity of *PaRappa* in the UK should ensure *Bust-a-Move* a western release



Players can choose from ten dancers, although it's not yet clear what separates them in terms of ability



total of 32 bouts, where the player will have to perform the maximum number of combinations. A total of seven combinations can be done successively, and players will receive points according to the combinations performed.'

Bust-a-Move's characters now betray little of their 'sexy game' roots. 'Our core target audience is secondary school students,' says programmer **Takeshi Kanai**, before Shirasu interjects, 'A total of ten characters are available in the menu, including five females. The game will also offer some hidden characters, including an animal, for example.' Character designs were supplied by Frame Graphics, a respected Japanese CGI company that has previously worked on commercials. But according to Shirasu, not all outside firms proved so easy to work with. 'We did experience some difficulties with the motion-capture data. It took us a long time to process it. Each company had a different idea of what *Bust-a-Move* should be like, and it was difficult to communicate our image of the game.'

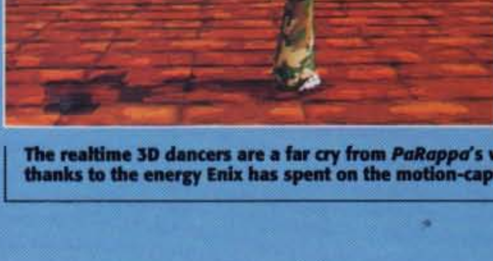
Inevitably, working in any newly emerging genre ▶

'Each company had a different idea of what *Bust-a-Move* should be like, and it was difficult to communicate our ideas'





Bust-a-Move's designer, Noburo Shirasu (left), and Enix's producer, Yasuhito Watanabe (right)





The realtime 3D dancers are a far cry from *PaRappa*'s wibbly-wobbly cardboard cutout-style characters. And, thanks to the energy Enix has spent on the motion-capture part of the equation, they should move realistically





Takeshi Kanai (left) is the programmer behind the project, working among a team of ten at Metro's HQ

will present fresh challenges, something which ensured the development of a close relationship between Enix and Metro. 'We wanted Enix to make a game that was fresh, so it was difficult for external staff to imagine what we wanted to do,' reveals Watanabe. 'The only one to have the game's global image in his mind was Shirasu-san. It was often difficult to communicate this image to others.'

Although development started on *Bust-a-Move* back in October '96, the upstart *PaRappa the Rapper* has beaten it to the market. Broaching this subject with the Metro team draws smiles all round. 'We had the feeling of being pipped at the post,' laughs Shirasu. '*Bust-a-Move* is often compared to *PaRappa* because it is based on a similar rhythm system. But primarily we want people to enjoy looking at characters dancing.'

For Enix, with its reputation built around creating

'Enix has had a conservative image – we want to demonstrate that the opposite is true, that we are open to new genres'

high-quality RPGs, releasing a title so glaringly offbeat as *Bust-a-Move* must entail something of a risk. Watanabe doesn't feel that to be true. 'We haven't abandoned the RPG – we demonstrated *Star Ocean* at the Tokyo Game Show, for instance. But we need to investigate new genres. RPGs take time to develop and require lots of staff. This time we wanted to create an original game based on an unique idea. Enix has had a conservative image – we want to demonstrate that the opposite is true, that we are open to a diversity of genres.' *Bust-a-Move* is sure to do at least that.







Echoing the approach of beat 'em ups, characters will duel against each other in a selection of varied stages

THE BIRTH OF A NEW GENRE, OR A FLASH IN THE PAN?

At a time when the very idea of a new game genre seemed unbelievable, 1997 has seen the arrival of a wave of novel music-themed titles.

The introduction of CD-ROM as a videogame storage medium was very obviously fundamental in the movement, allowing game designers to spawn products such as *Digital Dance Mix* for the Saturn and, most famously, *PaRappa the Rapper* for the PlayStation. While the former titles restricts interactivity to merely moving a virtual camera around a strutting songstress onscreen (and singing along, karaoke-style, if users have the right kit), Sony's universally lauded experiment works as a proper game, with distinct objectives.

Now *Bust-a-Move* is taking the genre to a new level. Heaven only knows where it'll end.









Sega's *Digital Dance Mix* (right, top left) offers limited interactivity, but its production values are stunning, with fabulous hi-res 60fps animation. *PaRappa the Rapper*, meanwhile, is a proper, if simplistic, gaming experience


NINTENDO64
4
HEAD TO HEAD
SONIC
SEGA SATURN
DAYTONA USA
1996年
STOP
日本
1996年
PlayStation
FIGHTING VIPERS

MARKETING WARS

SELLING THE VIDEOGAME DREAM

Ultimately, marketing doesn't win format wars. A mixture of other factors – chiefly technical capabilities, software support and pricing – usually decide the long term fate of just about any piece of consumer electronics hardware. In the heat of the battle, however, marketing can be a mightily powerful tool. And in videogame terms, this Christmas will be the mother of them all. Either Sony, Nintendo, Sega (and often all three) will advertise on TV every day from October 1 to December 31. Videogame marketing will be ubiquitous. You will love it, you will hate it, but you will not escape it.

Ostensibly it's a bruising head-to-head between Sony and Nintendo. Sega, however, is still sniping round the periphery, lining up a few tactical blows and just maybe influencing the agenda in preparation for its next comeback. Between them the three console companies will spend around £20 million in the UK alone during the last three months of the year. The leading software publishers will throw another £20 million or so into the pot. They will also utilise the specialist press, lifestyle magazines, radio, billboard poster sites, bus shelters, the Internet, toilet walls and beer mats. The common aim is at least two-fold. The primary goal, of course, is to shift units. At the same time (and to the same end) they want their brand to be as ferociously desirable as only a 'cool' product can.

Sony in particular has its sights trained steadily on the marketing man's nirvana: a mass market cult. This is a product that sells millions and yet retains its credibility; bought by *Sun* readers, loved by *i-D* columnists. Two of the best examples of mass market cults are Nike and Levi's. In fact, they're just about the only two brands that have managed to remain balanced on the gossamer tightrope between snobby elitism and crass populism for any length of time. Sony actually employs Simons Palmer, the ad agency behind the consistently brilliant Nike ads; it's no surprise, therefore, to see it making the most concerted effort to broaden the appeal of videogaming in general and the PlayStation in particular. The truth is, it's got nowhere else to go. A European installed base of nearly four million is testament to the fact that Sony has virtually saturated the hardcore gaming market. It now has to look further afield for new and more unlikely converts. And so Shapes was born, a campaign for a videogames machine which utilises precisely zero footage of video gaming.





A slice of Sony's audacious Shapes campaign (left). Sony's David Patton (right) suggests that the series of oblique TV ads are designed to broaden PlayStation awareness outside the videogaming fraternity

THIS CHRISTMAS WILL BE A BRUISING THREE WAY HEAD-TO HEAD. VIDEOGAME MARKETING WILL BE UBIQUITOUS. YOU WILL LOVE IT, YOU WILL HATE IT, BUT YOU CANNOT ESCAPE IT

This is a first. Shapes adverts are all 'slices of entertainment in the name of PlayStation'. They offer the wider public a glimpse of what the world of PlayStation is like, not in terms of mip-mapping, trilinear filtering, fps, anti-aliasing or any other potentially alienating technical abstractions, but in terms of emotions: excitement, fear, humour.

The absence of software footage also neatly bypasses a problem that has dogged advertisers for years; with the vital element of interaction missing, it's not always thrilling to watch someone else playing a game. At the heart of the Shapes campaign is a series of TV ads comprising 15-second vignettes in which the combination of triangle, circle, cross and square (as featured on the PlayStation controller) trigger all sorts of weird and wonderful happenings, from a businessman's taxi driver mutating into a skeleton, to a frozen

Eskimo hurtling out of a fridge-feezer in Australia. Sony's European marketing manager **David Patton** explains the concept:

'The shapes are the devices which let you into the PlayStation and what we're proposing to people is that through these shapes you can ride an emotional rollercoaster that will provide the same thrills and excitement as the ads do – only more so.' He also underlines Sony's desire to widen its net: 'We're looking to catapult the PlayStation brand into the heart of the leisure market. Sega, Nintendo and the PC are still around and still count as competitors, but we're now also competing with the TV, the pub and the cinema for the time and money people spend entertaining themselves.'

Michael Wall, account director at Simons Palmer, echoes: 'About a year ago it became clear that in terms of achieving Sony's aspirations and hitting the sort of numbers they were talking about, now would be the right time to broaden the appeal. Because of its dominance of videogames it's become incumbent on Sony to lead the market out of propellerhead territory and into the mainstream.' **Alex Fitzgibbons**, communications manager at Nintendo's UK distributor THE Games, thinks it's just another angle. 'It's a reflection of

'SONY MUST LEAD THE MARKET OUT OF PROPELLERHEAD TERRITORY'

the personality of the agency. We've all seen what Simons Palmer have done with Nike's swoosh and now they're trying to do the same with PlayStation. We're a creative bunch, we could have come up with some fantastically abstract concept, but I'm not sure how worthwhile that would have been.

'Personally I like the Sony ads – they're great little films – but you have to ask how they're going to sell PlayStation. What are they after, awards or sales?' THE/Nintendo's own line of attack is not nearly so oblique, being traditional, full-on TV ads packed with fast-cut product footage. It claims to be spending roughly the same amount as its great rival – although empirical observation would suggest Sony's media presence is more pervasive. Almost all Nintendo's TV, press and poster work concentrates on the specific software titles *Lylat Wars*, *GoldenEye* and *Diddy Kong Racing*. All end with the unequivocal tag line, 'The fastest, most powerful console on earth'.

There will be no dedicated brand-building spots. THE boss **Dick Francis** offers pointedly: 'Sony's obviously one of the strongest brands in the world, but now they're trying to build PlayStation as a standalone brand; we don't think we need to do that with Nintendo. The public knows all about Nintendo.' But while these two fierce rivals might differ in terms of style, content and concept – with Nintendo the battering ram and Sony the arch strategist – they will clash on some common ground. Both are looking to increase their appeal to the 12- to 18-year-old consumer this Christmas – although they're approaching their target from different directions. In the two years since its launch Sony has been selling PlayStations largely to twentysomethings making purchases for themselves. Nintendo, on the other hand, has been selling the N64, via parents, to its traditional sub-teen constituency.

As Fitzgibbons puts it: 'Sony have claimed the over-18s and we've claimed the under-12s. Now their software is taking them down the scale and ours is taking us up the scale, so the battleground becomes those 12-18 year olds.' Some of Nintendo's ads will, therefore, be pitched at a level distinctly more



Sega's marketing work has involved sponsoring touring cars and snowboarding events



Unlike its rivals, Nintendo has more than one format to promote in 1997; its Pocket Game Boy has been advertised using an atmospheric robotic production line theme

sophisticated than the lightweight, cartoony work it's best known for.

Nintendo is facing an uphill struggle to attain credibility with a sceptical teenage audience. Sony, on the other hand, cannot afford to alter the pitch that has served it so admirably since the end of 1995's worthless, excruciatingly embarrassing S.A.P.S. campaign. Only too aware that talking down to a teenage audience thrusts a shotgun into credibility's mouth, Sony will stick to the aspirational message that has seen the PlayStation blossom into an object of voracious desire for teens and pre-teens alike, and sucker-punched Sega's Saturn out into the doldrums of minority appeal.

After a couple of years of straggling off the pace, the Saturn looks to be running out of legs completely – although, admirably, there's no sign of a white flag just yet. Sega still sees the system as being worthy of a £4 million campaign including TV, national press and perimeter advertising at Premiership football grounds. In terms of style the firm has gone for an unfussy, direct approach. But then its priority for Christmas '97 is getting through rather than getting clever, to nurse Sega's wounded mass-market credibility until the arrival of its next console. Sega is channelling its attack through *Sonic R*, the latest game to feature its signature character, with a tag line 'R you smart enough to compete as Super Sonic?' clumsily referring to the game's hidden bonus character. The ads will run during key football matches, big movies and the most popular cable and satellite shows such as 'The Simpsons', with the target audience being 10- to 24-year-old males. They are designed not to leapfrog the Saturn to the forefront of next generation entertainment but simply to keep Sega in the game, maintain some sort of presence rather than retire from the field altogether. They also build on the culty, almost intentionally marginalised feel that's being built around the brand. It's an interesting tack, claiming outsider status as prestigious, tacitly implying that being outsold 10:1 by PlayStation equates to nothing less than a more selective appeal. Distancing the Saturn from the mainstream is a tempting tactic given its weak showing outside of Japan. But, whether enforced or not, it's a scam that just might permit the console to be a commercial failure without turning Sega into another Amstrad. E

SONY

CASE STUDY #1: THE MARKET LEADER

Spend: £30 million pan-European between September 1 and December 31
Agency: Simons Palmer
Brief: The propeller-heads are ours, now go get us Joe Public
Pitch: Market leader, massive software library, credible sector of front room entertainment rather than ghettoised toys for boys



The Shapes campaign: innovative and distinctive

After an early disaster in the form of the S.A.P.S. campaign, Sony's PlayStation marketing has been sharp, sussed and effective. It has constructed an image that resonates with quality, credibility and excitement – and a dash of eccentricity for belly-laugh appeal to the lowest common denominator as well (the man ranting about the end of the world being a case in point).

This Christmas, Sony and its ad agency Simons Palmer face a new challenge: to maintain the PlayStation's standing as the choice of the informed aficionado while reaching out for the true mass market: males and females from ages five to 50.

This ambition is reflected in the software mix. Titles like *F1 '97* and *G-Police* will appeal to the hardened gamer, but less traditional offerings such as *Hercules* and *Spice World* are designed to showcase the PlayStation as a hub of family fun.

Sony is attempting to deliver two almost contradictory appeals; on the one hand, the PlayStation as a cutting edge piece of technology optimised for the latest, greatest games. The message: it's hard, it's mean and if you don't know what you're doing it'll bite your hands off (a marketing ball fumbled by the 'your mother wouldn't like it' S.A.P.S. campaign).

At the same time, however, the machine is being groomed to present a welcoming face to those who've rarely strayed into the arena of interactive entertainment, and may have been frightened by what they saw there. The message here is that PlayStation ownership isn't the preserve of an exclusive enthusiast clique, it's a friendly piece of entertainment hardware, just like any other mod con. Stick it in the front room. Don't be scared, dive in. Sony's marketing must combine these two messages in 30 seconds.

To meet the challenge Simons Palmer has come up with the Shapes campaign. Using the triangle, circle, cross and square featured on PlayStation controllers, the series of ads are nothing less than mini-movies supposedly infused with the spirit of the PlayStation. Uniquely, there is no software footage. As Simons Palmer board account director **Michael Wall** explains, 'the ads are a glimpse into the world of PlayStation, they deliver the kind of emotions that PlayStation is capable of generating: excitement, tension, humour, fear.'

UK marketing director **Alan Welsman** is quick to point out, however, that the Shapes campaign does not herald a major shift in the overall positioning of the format. Sony has worked very hard to imbue its brand with credibility, and it's not about to throw that away by bringing Shane Richie in to issue the PlayStation challenge to bemused housewives the length and breadth of Britain. 'I guess the best way of putting it is that we're coming across as more approachable. The ads are more straightforward entertainment than anything we've done before. They've still got a cutting edge, they'll still appeal chiefly to a 16- to 24-year-old audience – but they won't do so to the exclusion of all other age groups.'

Welsman claims grandly that the Shapes ads offer nods to cinematic figures including Hitchcock and Spielberg, while there's apparently a touch of Jim Jarmusch in the *Crash Bandicoot 2* creative, one of seven PlayStation titles granted dedicated campaigns this Autumn. The other six are *F1 '97*, *Time Crisis*, *Final Fantasy VII*, *Hercules*, *Rapid Racer* and *G-Police*. These software-specific ads will feature footage from the games but, unlike the work emerging from Nintendo and Sega, each one will be introduced by a live-action storyline, at the end of which a glimpse of the four shapes leads into the software itself. Welsman stresses the importance of the product being the pay-off. 'The Shapes are just a device, a gateway to PlayStation – the games are still what count. We do want to broaden our horizons and the market generally, but we mustn't forget that we're a games company selling a games machine to people who want to play games.'



The *F1 '97* ad features a post-race interview, the driver claiming that 'somebody up there pressed the right buttons'



G-Police uses a short featuring a truck driver who manages to run to safety before gunfire destroys his vehicle



The gunman-in-a-training-facility theme for *Time Crisis* sees bullet holes whose shapes are familiar to PlayStation owners...

'NINTENDO

CASE STUDY #2: THE HARDWARE AND SOFTWARE KING

Spend: £7 million (UK only)
Agency: None
Brief: Establish supposed technical superiority of 64-bit product.
Pitch: Higher price equals better quality. Fewer games (but many classics), gaming heritage, focus on product – let others worry about image



Alexander Fitzgibbons of THE Games



'A thousand times more powerful than the computer that put man on the moon': THE's hardware TV campaign certainly works well in convincing non-hardcore gamers about the Nintendo 64's oomph

Without a pan-European infrastructure, Nintendo leaves the marketing of the N64 to individual distributors in different territories. In the UK this means THE Games.

Nintendo used the Leo Burnett agency to roll out the N64 to its British audience. A few months ago, however, they split amidst rumours that THE wasn't entirely satisfied with the results. THE's communications manager Alex Fitzgibbons describes the launch campaign as 'not bad', a choice of words that expresses true feelings lying in precisely the opposite direction.

He continues, 'This industry is so fast-moving that we questioned whether or not a company of that size (Leo Burnett being one of the largest agencies in the world) with a full-service philosophy could meet our demands. So we decided we'd go it alone, drawing in different talent from various sources as and when we need it.'

An example of this need for speed was highlighted recently when THE made the decision to cut the N64's retail price to £99 on October 16, announced the fact on the 22nd and was running an ad featuring the new price by the 24th. 'If we'd have asked Leo Burnett to work in that sort of time frame they'd have shat their pants,' says Fitzgibbons.

So, in the absence of a single agency, THE has constructed a piecemeal campaign that is part homegrown, part US import and part mix and match. The majority of the creatives come from, ironically enough, Leo Burnett US – Nintendo of America's agency – and Young & Rubicam, Nintendo Germany's agency.

A campaign attempting to amalgamate influences from such diverse cultures seems like a recipe for disaster but, as Fitzgibbons explains, it also presents opportunities. 'Basically we have access to all Nintendo's work in the US and it's all first class. We do research and set up test groups and if it looks like it will work over here then why change it? For a start it saves us the costs of production.'

The result eschews the 'high concept' pretensions of Sony's work in favour of fairly traditional methods and an aggressively direct line. Three TV ads feature *Lylat Wars*, *GoldenEye* and *Diddy Kong Racing*. Others showcase a selection of games, while some focus directly on the hardware. All will be rounded off by the tag line, 'The fastest, most powerful games console on earth'.

'The quality of the games is at the crux of what we're trying to get across,' says Fitzgibbons. 'Because of Nintendo's heritage and standing in the games market, we don't have to work the brand as hard as Sony are working PlayStation this Christmas. That gives us more opportunity to push the software forward and that's our strength.

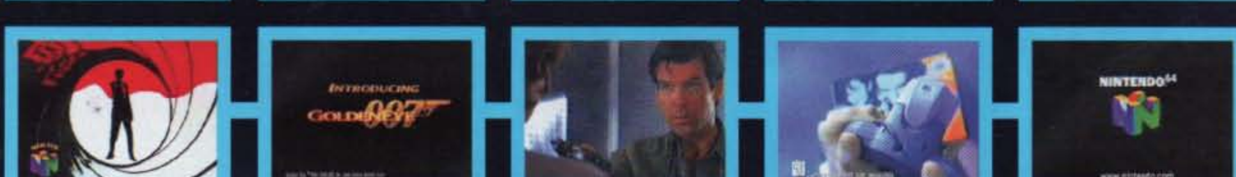
'Something like *GoldenEye* is a classic example. The ad mixes footage from the film and the game but they interlock so phenomenally well that it's really hard to tell them apart. That's a powerful message in itself.'



With a Murray Walker-style commentary, the *Mario Kart 64* ad plays up the N64's capability for four player action



Perhaps the most spectacular of any game ad ever, THE triumphs with *Lylat Wars*, building Rumble Pak awareness



The *GoldenEye* ad works well, especially with the 'you control the action shot by shot by shot' promise in the voiceover

SEGA

CASE STUDY #3: THE FALTERING GIANT

Spend: £4 million UK
Agency: Creative – HHCL Brasserie; buying – The Media Business
Brief: Carve out a niche for the Saturn in the short-term. Keep the Sega name alive and credible for the long term
Pitch: Er... difficult. Sega's chosen tactic seems to be to concentrate on the quality of *Sonic R*, reminding consumers of its expertise in software and challenging them to take it on. It's also building an image as a real gamer's machine – chiefly through links to prestigious coin-ops



Mischa Alexander of HHCL Brasserie

Sega was once the acknowledged master of guerrilla marketing. In the early '90s its campaigns were more creative than anything the market had previously seen, establishing Sega as the funky option to staid old Nintendo and helping the Mega Drive to outsell its rival all over Europe.

Those were Sega's salad days. Since then, European sales and staffing levels have dipped dramatically, making the company a shadow of its former self and leaving the Saturn a distant contender. The recent departure of its European managing director was just the latest blow to a firm that has suffered a disproportionate amount of knocks since its days as an untouchable.

Over the next few weeks, while Sony and Nintendo grapple for the lion's share of sales, Sega's task is to keep its brand credible. The corporation will be able to cope with the Saturn losing this year's sales battle, but it cannot afford to permit the Saturn to die and, in doing so, drag the Sega name into the doldrums with it.

Only *Sonic R* will benefit from substantial TV airtime in the crucial last quarter of the year. The ad features footage from the game, while the voiceover pay-off, 'R you smart enough to compete as Super Sonic?' continues Sega's tradition of using its marketing to issue gaming challenges.

Mischa Alexander, account director at HHCL Brasserie, outlines the thinking behind the campaign: 'The obvious thing to go on is the quality of Sega's software. What we're showing people is that the Saturn provides a depth of gameplay that isn't available anywhere else. All the games we've featured on TV have been exclusive to Saturn and all the ads have used continuous game footage. We've also added a few layers, chiefly by using each separate execution to present players with a new challenge, from the overhead kick in *Worldwide Soccer* to competing as Super Sonic in *Sonic R*.

'With the tips it's actually quite hard to freeze frame the screen at exactly the right point to make them legible – so that becomes a challenge in itself.'

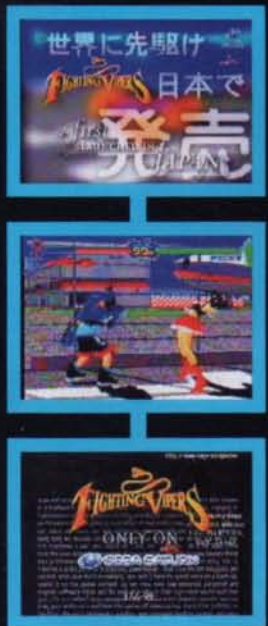
The one thing that has changed from last year's work is the voiceover. Previously the English voice has been a translation of background Japanese commentary, with Sega trying to stress its 'authentic' heritage. Alexander admits, however, that 'some people found that over-complicated'. Despite the fact that Sega is spending only just over half the money of its rivals, he's happy with the new TV work: 'Sony's taken a very strange approach. It's like spending $200 million on a Hollywood movie and then not showing any clips of the film itself in the trailer. It smacks of the ego of an agency looking to be different for the sake of it. Nintendo's tactic is more similar to ours in so much as they are at least showing their games, but it's very straight in and out. They haven't hung the footage around any central idea, they've just presented the product as is.'



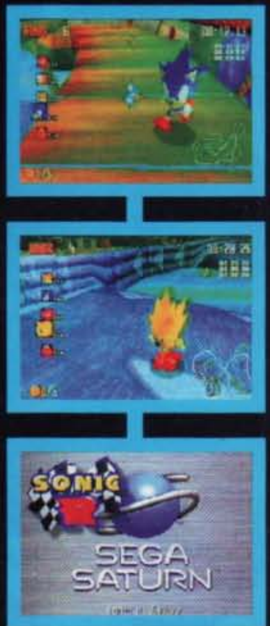
Last year, Sega's television marketing campaign was based around the fact that Japan already had the newest Saturn games; now it was the turn of UK gamers to prove their worth...



... something that could hardly be deemed a mainstream approach. In fact, by rubbing the delays in the faces of UK owners, Sega may have even alienated some consumers



Having goaded UK gamers with claims that certain moves in *Daytona USA* and *Worldwide Soccer '97* may be beyond them, Sega continued the theme with the *Fighting Vipers* ad



This year's ad for *Sonic R*, by comparison, does not mention Japanese gamers at all, yet it does claim that players have 'no chance' of competing as Super Sonic


TM
RAREWARE

It is one of the world's most renowned developers. It possesses a catalogue of titles spanning almost two decades. And through its relationship with Nintendo it has become one of the UK's biggest exports. And yet, apart from broadsheet coverage of its absorption into the Japanese-owned monolith last year, the UK's greatest videogame success story has deliber-

RARE

THE MINDS BEHIND THE MYSTIQUE

ately avoided the attention of the press. Ten years have passed since a games magazine was granted full access to its development facilities, in which time the company's publicity-shy reputation has been reinforced (wielding a dictaphone around these parts is tantamount to carrying a gun). But after years of waiting, Edge's chance to infiltrate its tightly knit operation arrives. So what's the secret?

If Rare's low profile is a conscious effort to distance itself from the hype that fuels the games industry, its farmhouse location at one end of a rural village in Twycross, Warwickshire, certainly cultivates the myth. There is no company sign at the entrance, just a portentous notice concerning the presence of guard dogs. But heading down the driveway into the central courtyard past a couple of free-roaming chickens, a car park packed to capacity with new sports cars finally betrays the company's videogaming heritage. A Lotus Esprit SE, a Mercedes SLK, and assorted pokey coupés and hot hatches all fast enough to terrify the average driver, congregate with an unassuming regularity. The couple of Ferraris lurking in a garage are perhaps the best evidence that potatoes and assorted veg aren't what earns a crust here.

The company's reticence to reveal much about its operation can be traced way back to when it was shaping the future of 8bit computer gaming as Ultimate Play the Game. Even then, well over a decade ago, it deliberately steered clear of making its presence felt at the major computing events of the day and distinguished itself from the low-rent crowd with clever teaser advertising and quality packaging. Even its game manuals were unconventional, often using quirky riddle-based messages to unravel their mysteries. The fact that many of the company's vast catalogue of classic games for the 8bit computers are still fondly remembered by gameplayers today is testament to their ingenuity.

Edge has been on Rare's case since the magazine launched in late 1993. Back then the company was in a hazy transitional period with its attention divided between 8bit and 16bit technology, but also with an expectant eye focused on the possibilities of 'Project Reality' – something which would later become the Nintendo 64. This investment in state-of-the-art workstation technology directly lead to the creation of the landmark SGI-rendered *Donkey Kong Country* and more recently has allowed the company to set a new high watermark for 64bit software in the form of *GoldenEye* and *Diddy Kong Racing* (see p84). Both these titles are ample proof that the company has matured into one of the world's major game development concerns.

Edge's visit to Rare is something of a privilege. For the magazine, that is. This is conveyed by the surprise elicited from Nintendo's US PR department that vaguely remembered when Rare's doors were last properly opened to a games magazine (the NES was state-of-the-art technology at the time). More recently a few games journalists may have made the trip to the Midlands to get a look at titles due for imminent release (*Diddy*



Kong Racing, for example). However, such is the level of secrecy employed that journalists have been confined to the protected environment of a demo room instead of being able to roam freely around interviewing its staff (only possible with prior submission of questions via fax or email). Even on this occasion the company ensures a dictaphone is running all day to simultaneously tape all communication with **Edge**. Paranoia, perhaps? Well, yes, but it's paranoia with a capital 'N' and that's the difference.

The company's reticence to reveal much about the way it designs videogames can be traced back to its 8bit days



The morning of **Edge**'s visit is beautifully clear and sunny, with a refreshing Autumn bite to the air. The photographer assembles the *GoldenEye* team in the dazzling daylight for a group shot while **Edge** meets the Rare guard dogs, which calm down enough to be stroked after their initial bout of frenzied barking. Despite this potential flaw in the security, virtually every building has a security camera on each corner perpetually scanning the farmhouse and its outbuildings. Eagle-eyed visitors might notice how the cameras themselves bear an uncanny resemblance to those featured in *GoldenEye*, tracking the casual stroller in a sinister fashion.

Perhaps understandably, Rare doesn't take any chances when it

1983



In the early days, trading as Ultimate Play The Game, *Jetpac* was a big hit for the Stampers

1983



Ultimate's creative spirit was unleashed in 48K (*Jetpac* used 16K) with the classic *Atic Atac*

1984



Knight Lore was revolutionary, introducing 8bit computer users to the wonders of isometric 3D

1984



Despite being 2D, *Underwurlde*, released at the same time as *Knight Lore*, was another hit

1984



Entombed was Ultimate's second C64 game, and was loved and loathed equally

comes to keeping its best-kept secrets well out of the public gaze and the result is an office complex with a security system more suitable to Fort Knox than a videogame developer. But while many of its neighbours have suffered from break-ins, Rare's intimidating CCTV and surveillance systems have so far proved an effective deterrent.

Given the close business links Rare enjoys with its its closest partner, Nintendo of America, a 6,000-mile gap actively discourages interference from the parent company. But considering its rich heritage of videogame production it's perhaps surprising that Rare hardly ever receives fan mail and the vast majority of customer feedback is directed at NOA in Redmond on the west coast of the US. Rare's location may not be publicised – the average uninitiated American gameplayer probably doesn't even realise there is any differentiation between the Nintendo brand and the curious Rareware logo. One eager American fan obviously did know the difference, though, and actually crossed the Atlantic to track down his favourite developer. But incidents such as these are, appropriately enough, rare. Being off the beaten track does ensure it



Rare's security is watertight – most buildings have infrared cameras so that any unwanted visitors are captured on film for the benefit of the local constabulary. The cameras' similarity to those which feature in N64 *GoldenEye* is actually no coincidence

relative obscurity compared to most large-scale developers. As managing director **Tim Stamper** puts it, 'It's insulated'.

Being insulated isn't just a result of its geographical, position, though. It's virtually a self-enforced doctrine adhered to by its 100-plus staff that helps to ensure information about its games stays within the company's walls. This is a kind of loyalty that seems to be embedded in the fabric of Rare's culture, rather than just the result of an repressive directive from the company's

Curiously, and possibly one of Rare's most revealing traits, is the fact that almost all of the 100-plus employees at Rare joined the company with no games industry development experience. It's hardly an accident either, and there is a genuine belief here that while a lack of experience will mean more training in the beginning, it often harbours a great desire to succeed and means its new staff are unlikely to bring bad habits with them. *GoldenEye* artist Karl Hilton completed a BA in Architecture until he realised it would be more

Being insulated isn't just a result of geographical position... It's almost a self-enforced doctrine adhered to by its 100-plus staff



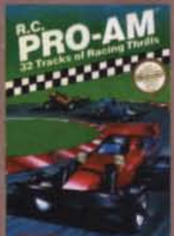
Trespassers should avoid the 'fierce' guard dogs. Unless they want to be licked, that is

management. It stems from every staff member feeling like they have something to gain from protecting their work until it's complete. Despite this, former **Edge** staff writer George Andreas – now working at Rare as a designer on *Banjo-Kazooie* – recently confided that it would be 'more than his job was worth' to leak information about any undisclosed projects in development at Rare. And far be it from the magazine to have ever considered him a placed source...

fun designing underground military bases for James Bond to navigate rather than real-life buildings. Meanwhile, Lee Schuneman left a career marketing swimming pools before his stint at Rare which now sees him as producer/designer on *Diddy Kong Racing*.

But how does a company that relies on inexperienced staff manage to release such a consistently good games? Is it simply a case of having a different attitude? **Edge** hopes to find the ▶

1988



RC Pro-Am was one of Rare's most acclaimed NES games. (Look for an influence in *DKR*)

1990



Solar Jetman was an admirable attempt at bringing the space-bound hero of *Jetpac* to the NES

1990



Rare reverted to isometric 3D for *Snake Rattle 'n' Roll*, another sizeable NES success

1991



Battletoads: Rare's attempt to outdo the faddish Ninja Turtles

1995



ACM on the Game Boy? *Well...*

answers in the Rare canteen where a subsidised menu is provided to make up for a dismal lack of local lunchtime eateries. **Edge** is impressed by the quality of the food and also the impassioned enthusiasm of its staff. *Blast Corps* designer **Martin Wakeley** singles out the company's global vision as a major factor: 'With most UK developers you're looking to create games for a section of the UK market, so in terms of quantity of games that you're going to produce it's going to be very small. Something I'd never even considered until I came here was the fact that there's a market that's ten or 20 times greater than the UK market in Japan and America and you can produce quality and open yourself up to a much bigger audience.'

Designing for this global market has its price, though, and in Rare's case it's an enormous investment in its staff in the form of one of the biggest Silicon Graphics networks in the country. **Edge** can't help noticing that while wandering around and meeting team members from various projects, everyone seems to have an SGI workstation on their desks. And if any of the team members require a new piece of software (each often costing upwards of several grand) all they have to do is ask – budgets, it seems, aren't really a factor here.

'You do tend to forget on a day-to-day basis exactly how large-scale this is,' adds Wakeley. 'And then you have a conversation with Howard Lincoln and you realise you are actually a core part of their marketing campaign and NOA's whole structure. They rely on you as much as you rely on them.'

Edge checks for someone holding answer cards up behind but it seems these feelings are shared throughout the company. The royalties that pay for the brand new cars in the car park are the visible proof that its a philosophy that works, too.



The company's new premises it plans to move into in August next year will hopefully afford it greater creative freedom







After *Diddy Kong Racing* (above) Rare's next releases are *Conker's Quest* (top) and *Banjo-Kazooie* (left)

Even spending just a short amount of time at Rare reveals that much of its working practices can be traced back to its relationship with Nintendo in the US, and perhaps more significantly in Japan. Some of its staff have recently come back from the East after being invited out by Nintendo's Kyoto division where it was asked to look at the latest projects and to discuss its approach to N64 development. Rare is the only company in the world that gets this kind of treatment. 'To be fair,' concludes Wakeley, 'the only real developers of our size in the world are NCL. They have the same sort of problems we have – they're in a very similar situation to us. We can learn a quite a lot from them and they also learn a lot from us as well.'

'You tend to forget on a day-to-day basis how large-scale this is... They [NOA] rely on you as much as you on them'

One thing it could have learned from the Japanese R&D division is that it is going to need to expand. **Edge** is shown a design plan for the brand new offices that it is set to move into next August. The buildings are located just down the road from the farmhouse in 90 acres of parkland. It's an idyllic setting and one which its directors hope will give its designers more creative freedom – and just possibly the opportunity to embark on slightly more off-the-wall projects.

As **Edge** finishes the last of its interviews, many of the staff are now huddled in groups in front of large TVs running multiplayer *GoldenEye* – an experience that has manifested itself in the daily routine at Rare: many finish their dinner quickly just so they can play for as long as possible. Aside from the glowing reviews it's the most impressive endorsement of one of its own games that a company could hope for. Even the legendary experience that is deathmatch *Quake* doesn't get a look-in.

As **Edge** wraps up its final interview Rare's car park erupts into the equivalent of a race track starting grid. It's Tuesday evening and the company's weekly five-a-side match beckons as eager game designers begin to rev out of the main drive in a 16 valve-charged convoy. For some, of course, it's just a brief respite and they probably won't be heading home until closer to midnight. But working at Rare is more than just a job. And perhaps that, more than anything, *is* the secret. **E**

1994



Rare's big breakthrough – in technical and brand terms – was SNES *Donkey Kong Country*

1995



The SNES conversion of *Killer Instinct* consolidated Rare's mastery of the 16bit format

1996



Rare's first original title for the N64, *Blast Corps*, demonstrated innovative gameplay structure

1997



Perhaps the company's best game to date, *GoldenEye* reinvents the firstperson genre

1997



Rare shows it has established strong characters of its own with *Diddy Kong Racing*

STAMPING THEIR MARK

In their first in-depth interview for many years, Rare's founders, brothers Chris and Tim Stamper, share their views with Edge



Managing director **Tim Stamper** (left) and brother **Chris**, technical director

Edge: Let's start with this: why has Rare been so secretive over the years?

Tim Stamper: I guess we're not here for personal publicity, we're here for publicity for the company; rather than seeing an interview with a picture of somebody and a picture of the game, we're here to promote and push the videogame as far as we can.

Chris Stamper: I think another reason, as well, is that there just aren't enough hours in the day. We're still working ridiculous hours, seven days in the week, and I'd much rather focus on the games we're working on than spend time promoting ourselves. We've always taken that sort of approach.

TS: We get people writing to us to do conferences and things like that and if we did all the conferences and all of the speeches I just don't know what we'd tell all these people, you know: 'write good videogames, see you'. [Laughs]

CS: There's always something to do on the latest games that we're working on; there's always some detail that we need to look at, to review, and when you're happy with one part, you just move on to the next, so it never ends, and I'm much happier getting involved with the games than with anything else.

Edge: Was it the same when you were Ultimate?

CS: Even more so, because there were so few people there that we did everything and there just wasn't any time at all. We were distributing and packing the games in boxes, the whole thing. It was just one big rush in total, there was no time to do anything else.

Edge: Do you think that this facet of Rare's character create a natural synergy when you started working with Nintendo?

CS: I think Nintendo were very comfortable with us because we weren't publicising ourselves to a great degree. Our objective has always been quality first – that is number one – and I think that we show them these are the sort of games that we can write and that we want to produce and that is foremost in everything we're trying to achieve. I think there's a natural sort of synergy between us [and] I think it works extremely well in the present day: they don't get involved with us at all. I mean, we decide what games we're going to write, we decide exactly what we're going to do. They just expect us to produce great games, and that's exactly what we're here for.

Edge: In terms of keeping everything under wraps on a company-wide scale, how do you implement that?

CS: We started off obviously as a very small company, we've been growing steadily, we've had our growing pains, but what we try and do is keep the teams in terms of one team working on a project and provide that team with everything they need so that they kind of feel that they are a small company under a larger umbrella, and we try to provide everything that that smaller group actually needs to produce the game. So I think it works within itself – the team, as I say, have everything that they need and they can go ahead and produce, hopefully, a great game. And there is some sort of competitive element between the teams but my job and Tim's job is to make sure that the resources of the company are spread evenly and that advances in one group can be shared with the others.

TS: I think that the competition we have is fairly healthy. Each team creates its own engine for its game, but there's a company camaraderie that when the game is finished there are all of these resources available to the other groups. But usually then the team gets back down and starts focusing on its new game so that one game will reach there and another game starting will start from this as a springboard and they'll look at that and how they can elevate themselves to a new position.

'I'd much rather focus on the games we're working on than spend time promoting ourselves. We've always taken that approach...'

CS: It works reasonably well. I mean, if you think of a group like *DK Racing*, the whole group has a vested interest in that product, so they're the last people that are going to be divulging anything about it and so it's very, very tight. They'll only want the very best for their product, and the other groups know roughly what the product is but they don't have an in-depth understanding, and we like to keep it like that because at some stage in the development of each game we like to call on members of the other teams and say 'Look, we've got to this level now, and we think we've got something very special, can we get some of your guys in, we're not going to tell you anything about it; would you like to play it?' and just see what sort of reactions we get. I think there's another issue as well as in terms of we've often worked on projects that at some stage, when we have an engine going and we can see what sort of game we have, that isn't a guarantee that it's going to go ahead. There have been quite a few games that we've worked on that we said 'That's just not going to make it', and we axed it there.

TS: That could have been nine months of development when the game is suddenly axed and the public would never see it and that's a difficult situation for a thirdparty company to be in which has a deadline to reach, which is paid to produce a product, they're almost pushed down the road and must finish this game, whereas I think that we have a little bit of leeway and flexibility that if a game's not going right we can axe it and we can start again and regroup. I just think it makes for a better game for the marketplace and if shots were ▶



released before that game came out you might get a different impression of what was intended to be released.

THE NINTENDO CONNECTION

Edge: You mentioned Nintendo's marketing teams not being involved with your products – does that mean that only people such as Hiroshi Yamauchi, Shigeru Miyamoto, and Howard Lincoln are given access to that information?

CS: They don't really know the games that we're working on, we decide at Rare all of the games that we're going to write and then they will be the first people that will actually see the game in progress but the design and the initial decision to go ahead with that game happens here.

Edge: That's interesting considering the general perception tends to be that Rare and Nintendo work hand-in-hand, certainly with some of the bigger and more recent releases. Isn't that the case?

CS: No. They obviously would indicate, you know, they'd say 'We'd love this type of game' or whatever, and we would certainly listen, but we pretty much decide what it is we want to produce.

Edge: So wasn't it difficult dealing with a Nintendo property like *Donkey Kong*?

'You have to remember there was nothing available on *Donkey Kong* before we actually took it on board... just this small sprite'

CS: It was, but you have to remember there was nothing available on *Donkey Kong* before we actually took it on board – it didn't have anything, it had not been developed, it was just this small sprite from this arcade game from way back. When you say 'Donkey Kong' now you don't think of the old game, you think of the new game.

Edge: How do you feel about the child-oriented nature of most of Nintendo's games? *GoldenEye* seems to fly right in the face of that – was that deliberate?

TS: I think that if you look at successful films, there aren't that many successful films that aren't PG rated. Films have to go across the board to be very, very successful and we're here to write a successful product and not target a core or specific audience. There are a lot of games now that are dark and depressing and kids don't want to play those. And all of these companies out there producing these types of games, maybe they're writing games for themselves and not for the audience.

Edge: Do you not feel like writing a game for yourselves, occasionally?

CS: I love the games that as you say are Nintendo-style games. *DK Racing* for me, that sort of style would never stop me from playing that game – I think it will have appeal across the generations, and I think that's great. I don't want to play these games which are targeted or skewed for the higher age groups, I want to play something that's fun.

Edge: So how do you feel about the graphical content in *GoldenEye*?

CS: I thought that was great. I think that it's excellent that Rare is in a position now to allow its teams to look at that style of product. I wish somehow we could get that sort of gameplay and skew it slightly younger as well, because I still think that those people that are interested in gameplay itself would play the game regardless of whether it looks slightly cuter. But, yeah, I think it's a wonderful game, I think it does show the sort of things that Rare is capable of.

Edge: Were you not worried about Nintendo's reaction to the violence in *GoldenEye*?

TS: Yes, we were very worried. [Laughs]

CS: But you must remember that it is a known quantity, it is understood: Bond is licensed to kill.

TS: And not licensed to limp. [Laughs] I mean, the character wasn't created by us, we were just producing the game around the movie and I think the job that was done was tremendous.

Edge: Will there be a sequel?

TS: Yes, the Bond team are working on another game.

CS: And at the moment they're working to make some significant improvements to the engine so I'm sure they'll come up with something very exciting for the future.

Edge: Which of Rare's N64 titles do you think is the best to date?

CS: They all have their merits, I'm very proud of the N64 games we've made. I think Bond is a wonderful game and *DK Racing* is as well – they're just excellent games. They're certainly in my collection.

Edge: You mentioned Rare is autonomous when it comes to a game's contents, but do you have much communication with Nintendo in Japan?

TS: Yeah, we occasionally visit them.

CS: But we don't have any input as such into their games. When we visit them they show us what they're working and when they visit us we show them what we're working on.

Edge: You seem to share a similar design philosophy...

TS: I think we've been working with them for so long, we've been working with them for 12 years, 13 years – it's a long time. And our sort of target audience is the same as theirs. We want games to do well in Japan and America and it wants to be basically the same game, and it's taken a long time and a lot of hard work to achieve that.

A ONE FORMAT COMPANY

Edge: At the moment, Rare must be one of the few developers in the world that isn't working on the PC. Why is that?

CS: I'm very, very comfortable working on the N64. I see the PC as something of a nightmare in terms of trying to produce games for that platform. For myself, involved with the technical side, the N64 is a wonderful machine to work on...

TS: That doesn't mean to say we don't play PC games; we do.

CS: [Laughs] That's true, but the thing I like about the N64, and I don't think many people realise, is that because it's a cartridge based machine, although some people see that as a disadvantage, each time you add a larger cartridge to the N64, you're changing the whole machine itself, it becomes more powerful. As time progresses, the N64 is becoming a more capable machine. The PlayStation is pretty

much fixed in what it is but the N64 has a capability that's expanding, so I think you're going to see that the N64 games are going to continue to improve and grow and it's going to be not only the evolution in the techniques that we have but because of cartridges getting larger and because you can dynamically download so much information from the cartridge, it's like just having a bigger machine with more memory. So it's a wonderful machine to actually work on and I think that the future of the N64 is quite interesting.

Edge: But surely it can't be a question of power as a top-end PC with a decent card is arguably more powerful than an N64.

CS: It probably is, but I don't think there are that many of those configurations in a sense. We're much happier producing on a standard format which we know exists and is designed for actually playing games.

Edge: The PlayStation seems like an easy platform to port games to from the PC – would you say the N64 would be harder to develop in tandem with the PC?

CS: I think if you're going to develop with your eye on porting it to another platform, I think you're going to make compromises right from the start, and we don't have to do that. We just look at the N64 and say 'Okay, what's the best possible game that we can produce on that?', with no thoughts of how we might convert that, and I think that's important. And I think also, which is something we touched on before, we want to be in a position where we can throw enough resources at developing a game and then feel



comfortable that we can get that return back to carry on the process. I don't think we could that on the PC and I don't think we could do that on the PlayStation. I think it's too confused a market.

RARE'S COMING OF AGE

Edge: Have these resources come solely from the Nintendo deal?

TS: I think it was the process of going through all the types of products that other companies have to go through – conversions, thirdparty work – to reach the point that we've managed to reach that we had to take on because the company needed to survive, before it could reach a stage where it could produce its own dream products.

Edge: But do you think it would be fair to say that nobody else could have made *Donkey Kong Country* at the time it was produced?

CS: I think that's probably very, very true. I think that you have to have the resources and you have to have the confidence.

TS: We had a meeting about this list of equipment that was required to write *Donkey Kong Country* and it was colossal, and I guess that was a turning point in the company's life. The safe way would have been to have said 'No, we will not buy that equipment yet, we'll wait until the price comes down' and somebody else would have got it, I'm sure. But it was a big decision, a big decision for the company. If it had gone wrong, it probably would have broken us.

Edge: So was it a case of getting out the calculator and working out how much rendering was required?

CS: Yes, we worked out how much the SG equipment and all of the licences for the seats would cost us. It was a lot of money, a big investment for that type of game.

Edge: Presumably the profits more than balanced the books?

CS: Well, yes, I think it's in 'The Guinness Book of Records'. It's just a phenomenal seller.

Edge: Which game are you proudest of, or have the fondest memories of?

TS: The ones we haven't written yet. [Laughs]

CS: We have fond memories of a lot of games – they all have meanings for certain reasons. Obviously *DK Country* is a wonderful game and we have some wonderful memories of.



At the moment I think *DK Racing* is a wonderful product, it's something we're very, very proud of – Bond as well. As Tim said it's the later games that we're really interested in and the ones that we're working on now that we find even more exciting.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SIZE

Edge: Do you agree with the school of thought that states that there is no longer room in this market for small developers starting out – that they'd find it too difficult to compete?

CS: It's a problem for sure, there's no question about it, but what's interesting is that now that we are a publisher we are being contacted by small developers, and our philosophy has always been 'what does it take to produce a number one best-selling game?', and we're not going to be saying to people 'Can you produce a game for this deadline or for this much money?'. So I think there are opportunities for those small developers but it does need to be with someone who has the resources to actually make it all happen. The equipment you need, the time you need – it's a big, significant undertaking.

Edge: Presumably there's no way a small outfit with ten staff could try and take on a game like *Conker's Quest* – it would have to design a game that would reflect its means?

CS: I think that it's very difficult. I think realistically you need to look at a two-year window to produce something very, very special. Really, you probably need more than ten people to do that and if you want to look at what it's going to cost for 15 or 20 people for two years...

TS: But every game doesn't have to be like a *Conker's Quest*. *Tetris* wouldn't take ten people two years to produce. I think if any of the small development companies have a great idea that they're confident they can pull off and it can work if they had the resources, they should contact a bigger software company and see if they can get some sponsorship or some assistance.

CS: Yeah, I think it's about getting the deal, it's exactly what we did. ▶

I think there are steps that you have to take if you think you're going to jump right to the top on the very first game – it's just going to be so difficult to do. There's nothing wrong with moving one step at a time, and that's exactly what we did: we paid our dues by producing a lot of conversions in the early days.

Edge: What do you think of the general quality of software today?

TS: Working in the software industry it's always great to see other companies producing number one games or games that are really, really good because I think it perpetuates the industry. We're all gameplayers here, we love to play other people's great games and it is disappointing when you go out onto the streets and take your hard-earned money and you buy a game that looks good and you're unhappy with it. And it's kind of part of our idea – traditionally our audience is younger than the PlayStation audience, which is 21, our core audience is probably the 12 year old – they've haven't got a lot of disposable income and it's very, very important that when they buy a game that it's good, and I like to think that we did everything we could to make that game as good as we possibly could because these young kids are going to spend their money on it, so I think that's really important and maybe if other companies had that kind of concept rather than just putting a game out because of getting pushed by the deadline, there'd be more high-quality software.

THE POWER OF PLAYSTATION

Edge: The PlayStation seems to be dominating the market at the moment in terms of sales, installed user base and developer support. What do you make of that?

TS: Well, I think, with regard to developer support, Sony have made it really easy for a smaller developer to jump online with their system and produce a game that is going to be sold. I don't know how many they're selling, but I gather it's not very many units, especially with a company that is not fully funded. It's far more difficult with Nintendo so I think Sony can proliferate with its number of titles.

Edge: Do you think Nintendo has it right in terms of number of titles out there? If you had the choice, would you prefer to produce more?

TS: I'd sooner do fewer titles that were of higher quality. I guess the ultimate game is one that would always manage to change itself and you would never get bored with it, like golf, which lots of people get stuck in and get addicted, and it varies every time they play it. Sure, they change the courses, but it's always the same game, and I wonder one day if a videogame would ever reach that sort of status – that would be a game that would be great to write. And I'd rather see one single high-quality game rather than ten low-quality games.

CS: I think Sony has a wonderful brand name and they have a very good machine but at the end of the day I think that if it's quality that you're looking for, I think that you have to pick the N64. And if you're looking for a machine whose game quality will continue to improve, the N64 is the only candidate.

'I would look at the two systems and say that the PlayStation is on a downward market spiral and the N64 is on an upward spiral'

Edge: But if you're making games for experienced gamers, how are you going to open up this market to the true mass market?

CS: The experienced gameplayer will have the opportunity to experience the whole game as it was intended. Our games are designed so that the novice player will still get a great deal of enjoyment. A novice player can pick up something like *DK Racing* and can begin to win the balloons and open up more tracks and just have a great time on that. The experienced gameplayers can really start to look and go through the whole two adventures, so that's what we try and design internally.



Edge: Do you not feel there's a risk of alienating the average gamer with something as initially daunting as *GoldenEye*? Somehow, it's easier to imagine a parent getting to grips with *Ridge Racer*, for example.

CS: I think it's down to trying it and experiencing it. I noticed that the rental figures for Bond in the States are astronomical, and it's beating everything else by maybe three to one. So there are a lot of people out there that are trying it saying 'Hang on, there's something really interesting in here'.

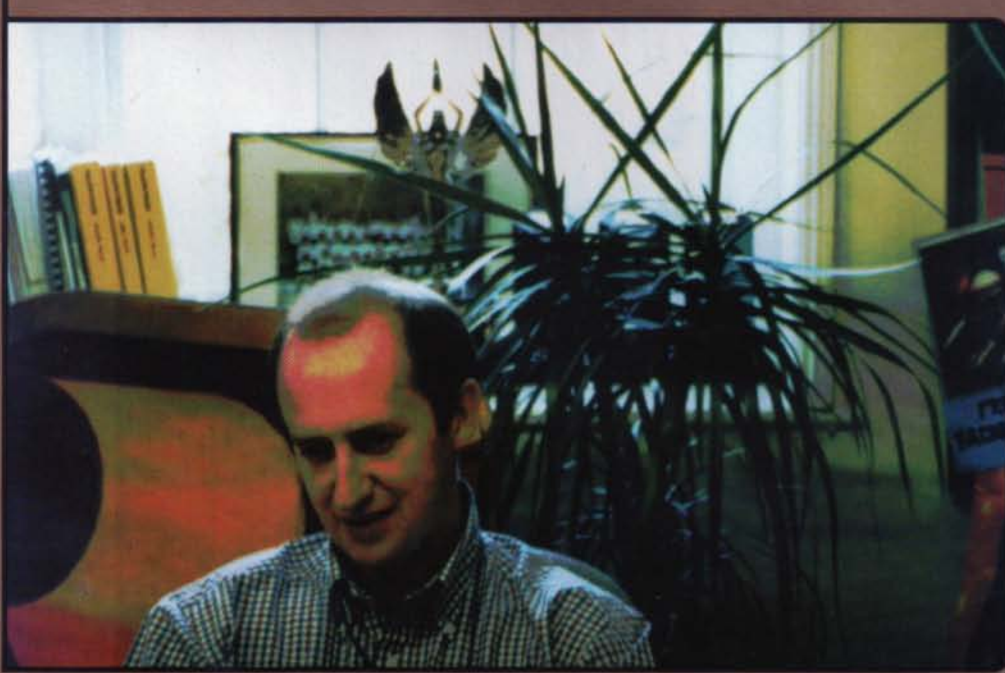
Edge: What do you think about the danger of potentially overcrowding the market with low-quality games?

CS: If there is an overcrowding, there are too many games, there's confusion, there's a tendency to reduce the price of games because of that. Then how are developers going to generate enough resources to actually produce a triple-A product? It's not going to happen.

TS: It's kind of getting like the old budget market in the UK in the '80s, when there was a rush of substandard software.

CS: I would look at the two systems and say that the PlayStation is on a downward market spiral and the N64 is on an upward market spiral.

Edge: Do you not think that if we're heading for a crash similar to the end of the 16bit market, the N64 would be dragged along whether or not it played a major part in the affair? In other words, won't the



whole videogame industry suffer?

CS: I think we're all aware that it is a fashion business, and I think that we have to be ready for the lean times and that's one of the wonderful things about Rare. We're working hard to maintain Rare's position in the marketplace. The PlayStation developers I've spoken to lead a pretty hand-to-mouth existence; when the market changes they're going to be in trouble.

TS: And it is an entertainment industry, and people are getting more and more spare time and they want to be entertained, so the industry isn't going to be here today and gone tomorrow. I've heard people speculate about this for 15 years, and it's still here and we're still here producing games.

Edge: Do you think that games are getting better, generally?

TS: Yes, but talking about the mass of PlayStation games, I mean, we're in the industry and I couldn't't to tell you what all the PlayStation games are like. If you gave me a list of the 300 or so titles released by this Christmas, I just wouldn't know what they're like. And how anybody else – a mother, a father, or brother or somebody who's got a machine – is going to know which game to buy unless they're specifically told is beyond me.

Edge: This is probably why we are seeing an increase in the number of big licences again, which is a side of the industry that is unfortunate...

CS: We were concerned about taking on the Bond licence but I think because of our reputation we had a lot more flexibility than any other company would have had and we were able to produce something very special.



VIDEOGAME VIOLENCE

Edge: With regard to *GoldenEye*, which obviously contains blood and the shooting of human opponents, what are your thoughts on violence in videogames?

CS: Well, as I said, we felt reasonably comfortable with *GoldenEye* as it's in a known context so you know it's a military style game, therefore there's an implicit understanding that there is violence associated with it. If you buy some other game and then you get innocent civilians being shot in the streets – that I have a problem with. So I didn't have as much problem with Bond because it's a given. But the mainstream effort for Rare's games is to produce games which don't rely on violence. After a while, I think, when you're playing these games you don't notice whether it's violent or not. You may find it entertaining for the first few minutes and then you forget about it and what you're interested in is the gameplay. And you don't need the blood and you don't need other things like that. I think that the context is very important and I think that having a rating is very important.

Edge: We're now at this hazy stage where in-game animation has advanced to the point where it is convincingly realistic, and within five years it will surely be possible to show truly gruesome levels of detail to the player.

TS: But why would you want to show that? If you want to see that then buy a video. I don't think it adds any gameplay and it's probably not a road that we want to go down. It's just pointless to appeal to that end of the audience like that.

CS: Yes, I think that's a very short-lived road to take, and I think there's far more mileage in producing games that don't rely on violence for entertainment. It will keep resurfacing, and I think it does need to be addressed and I think that the content does need to be indicated on the packaging.

TS: I think the violence thing is also escalating with the age of the players as well. A 20 year old expects there to be violence in games and a 12 year old doesn't.

THE FUTURE

Edge: Where do you think you're gong to be in five years' time – do



you think you'll be developing videogames or do you have ambitions to do something else?

CS: No, I think that we'll still be around. Our plan is to actively encourage the new generation of designers and engineers within the company. I think myself and Tim are now taking a more overseeing sort of role and I see that continuing. We've got so many great people coming through that already it's more their sort of games that are being produced. I still think we'd be pretty much the same thing.

Edge: There is currently a lot of interest in online games; many are suggesting that it represents the future.What are your thoughts?

TS: I'll handle this one. [Laughs] I was asked the same question in Japan. I'm not a big fan of network gaming. I think if you have to go and play a game over a network it shows that the AI in the game is not good enough. I think that probably the best gaming experience we get is when you get a network machine connected to someone you know. In a company building you've got a network and you can play PCs across the network and get four machines connected together and people fighting in groups, and it's really, really good fun. Now, why you would want to play anybody that you don't even know is completely beyond me. In a network game, somebody beats you or you beat them and you can go round and make fun of them and say 'Well, you didn't do very well, I kicked your butt – try me next time', it's just part of the whole social thing. But to play somebody you don't know is just such a bizarre concept... I just find it very alien.

CS: For me, multiplayer games are about four people using one console, with one screen.

TS: But you have to know the people you're playing with. It's like in an arcade, with a two, three, or fourplayer game – if there are people on there you don't know, people don't generally want to play, especially if they're bigger than you and you beat them.

THE GOLDEN TOUCH

Destined for true classic status in years to come, *GoldenEye* is perhaps Rare's most accomplished achievement to date. Edge met with the team responsible and spoke to some of its key members



Perhaps more than any other title, *GoldenEye* is the greatest example of Rare's creative and technical expertise, having pushed back the boundaries of the videogame. It's a title that seems to have captured the essence of 64bit gaming with unbridled sophistication, shunning the bright and breezy attitude of most N64 titles in favour an altogether more mature theme. In short, it's a modern classic. Perhaps most surprisingly, it was created in the most part by individuals who hadn't worked in videogames development before.

Edge met the team behind the project and spoke to three of its key members – Martin Hollis (game director/programmer), Dave Doak (software engineer/designer), and Karl Hilton (3D artist).

Edge: So, apart from the film (obviously), what were the main influences for *GoldenEye*?

Martin Hollis: We couldn't pretend we didn't play *Doom* a lot.

Karl Hilton: And *Virtua Cop* as well. It was pegged as being a *Doom* and *Virtua Cop* synthesis at the beginning.

Edge: And when exactly did the work on the project begin?

Dave Doak: Two and a half years ago. Well, no, probably getting towards three years ago now – it was January 1995. It was when we were first getting the emulators for the N64 chipset. I remember we didn't actually have the actual hardware at the time.

DD: There was all the pain of changing over to new hardware.

MH: It was just an enormous amount of trouble because we didn't have the final hardware and we were using Onyx emulators; we didn't get much mileage out of them at all. Then we received an early build of the actual N64 hardware and we realised that it was quite different – it wasn't an emulator any more, it was some approximation of an N64.

Edge: How long was it before you got the game engine running?

MH: Probably about a year. It was a very long time because I remember in '95 there wasn't much of a game.

Edge: It was first shown at Shoshinkai on video, wasn't it?

KH: There was no gun on screen, no deaths, you got to travel around the archives and that was about it.

CONTROLLING JAMES BOND

Edge: What do you think separates *GoldenEye* from most firstperson PC games?

MH: I guess the major difference is with the control system. It's a fairly obvious remark, but an analogue controller makes a big difference. The analogue stick is good – it's perfect, I suppose.

Edge: Yes, but it could be argued that using a mouse with a PC offers a similar degree of flexibility.

MH: Yes, that's true, but it's not the same because you keep having to move it back, whereas the N64's stick re-centres.

KH: There's been a lot of stuff on the Net about why we haven't got a jump or why we haven't got a run button. Firstly the analogue's meant to be for running anyway – if you push forward you are running and if you look at the speed you're going it's actually quite realistic for running. Secondly, there are no more buttons left anyway for a run or a jump so you'd have to start doing strange combinations with things. You'd need a joypad with, say, 14 buttons if you want to get everything that everyone wants in a PC game.

MH: The worst thing about running is that everyone runs the whole time anyway. On *Quake* you've got a configuration that says 'run always'. Well, it's like, what's the point of having walking? It's just completely redundant.

Edge: *GoldenEye* probably exploits the N64 controller to its fullest potential to date. How much thought went into that?

MH: We went through a lot of control systems.

Edge: The default control actually seems the most awkward to get to grips with...

KH: Do you think so? Because I hate the *Turok*-style one. The feedback we've got back off the Net seems split 50/50. There are a lot of kids – most of the feedback is from America because they've

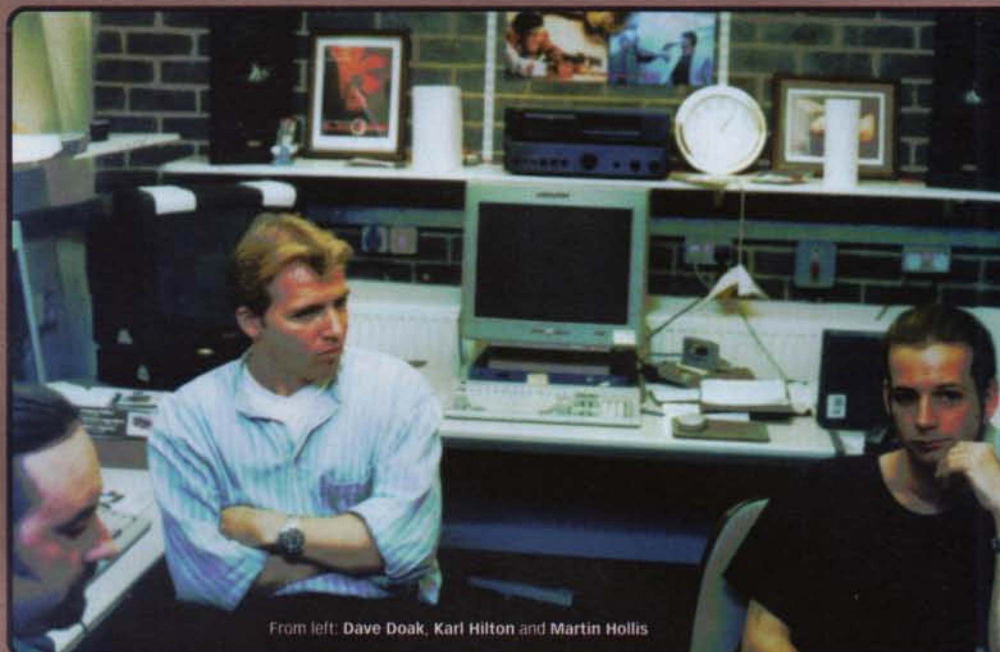




Most of the *GoldenEye* team had no game experience prior to the project

been playing it for quite a while now – and half of them are saying the default setting is the best and the other half prefer the *Turok* one.

MH: We did the *Turok* one last because basically we had a lot of control systems but everyone in testing, everyone in America and everyone at Rare, said 'We think the default one is fine' and most people seemed to be of the opinion we should take all the others out. But there were like two people at Rare that said 'It would be good if it had one like *Turok*' so we said 'Okay, we'll do that'. We put that in last and I'm glad we did. I mean, we were seriously considering having absolutely no selection at all.



From left: **Dave Doak**, **Karl Hilton** and **Martin Hollis**

DETAIL TO DIE FOR

Edge: What feature in *GoldenEye* are you most proud of?

DD: All the things I did... [Laughs] No, there really are so many different things.

MH: I'd say the overall detail. It's unfair to single out one thing because there are a lot of innovative things: polygonal characters from the film, a polygonal multiplayer mode, etc.

> **'We only played multiplayer *Quake* for the first time the other day... It seemed good fun but I wouldn't say I was bowled over'**

KH: I do like the shooting of different body parts. Trying to shoot someone in the backside is still one of the best pastimes.

Edge: How much hard work was that – presumably you implemented a lot of motion capture? Was that done in-house?

KH: We had a system set up here.

Edge: Because it seems to be a whole lot more realistic than most animation in other games...



MH: A great deal of effort was put into the motion capture and cleaning it up. It's got some really sophisticated, technical blending and drawing of scenery and stuff – the soft fillets [soft skin] that *Turok 2* is supposed to have are in *GoldenEye*, but we don't think it necessary to make a big song and dance about it. And there are many other things like that that we shan't be mentioning.

DD: One of the things that seems to be enduring about it, as you were saying, is the detail – it's nice to see people who played it and they'll notice something that they hadn't noticed before; that you can actually shoot things – objects around the floor, or something like that – which is something they weren't expecting.

KH: Or watching what the guards are doing when they don't think you're watching them, and they start yawning and swatting at flies. There's a lot of stuff like that.

Edge: The attention to detail is impressive. How much of a part does the hardware play in this?

MH: We set out with an unusual attitude which was simply that we'd just model the graphics and not even think about whether it was possible to put them on the system – partly borne out of practical considerations because we didn't have any system – but we just carried on blindly and...

KH: It was my first game so I didn't know what was required except that we were doing it in polygons. We didn't have a system yet so I just sat down and started evolving the stuff from the films that we knew about and it just developed from there. And I think probably because none of us had done a game before, we didn't worry too much about whether you could do this or not, or whether it had been done – we just thought: that would be a cool idea and that would be a cool idea, and we put it all in and when we finally got the stuff running we could see whether it was going to run or not.

MH: It took a very long time to get the incredibly ambitious models running at a decent speed.

DD: The greatest struggles were driven by the film – if we'd sat down to it without those constraints of working to the film and things, we might have just stuck to building interiors all of the time. Things like the dam and the cradle – the cradle's just insanity, it's like, why would you want to build something you can see all of at once?

KH It's basically got everything in it that you shouldn't do in a 3D game [laughs], but it was important in the film and we had to have it at the end. It went through two or three stages of modelling before the final version. It got completely changed once and then it got cut down and then cut down again and then cut down again...

Edge: It must have been difficult to keep this level of detail and variety in a 96Mbit cartridge.

MH: It used to be 380Mbits.

Edge: That would be good to play, have you got it here?

MH: Well, it's actually the same – it's just compression, simply very good compression.

KH: That's why the game's turned out well, I think, because we didn't limit ourselves at the start, saying 'Right, you can have 20 textures for this level, and you can have 20 textures for this level and that's it'. We just built the levels and afterwards we're like 'This is a bit expensive, can you cut out a couple of things?' I mean, St Petersburg got quite a lot of textures cut out of it – it was a lot more adventurous than that originally. A couple of the other levels also had to be looked at but ▶

very little remodelling was done. Generally most of it went in as it was designed and as it was built. And a lot of it actually got made more expensive because over two years, the first stuff that was done started to look not as good as the later stuff we did, so I went back and redid the early stuff. So it went through several generations.

MULTIPLE BONDING

Edge: How did the fourplayer mode come about? It's more accomplished than that of, say, *Hexen 64*, but was it still added quite late in the day?

MH: I suppose it was, it was probably about March or something when I decided that it would be a very good idea despite all the deadlines. Everyone was saying at that time that it wouldn't be any fun with splitscreen, it wouldn't be any good. And I was kind of listening to those remarks and believing them, but they turned out to be completely false because if you're sitting beside the other three people, you can shout and scream at them – you can see their reaction in a way that you can't when it's on a network. It's a shame you need a big TV to get the most of out of it, though.

KH: We spent many a late evening playtesting the multiplayer mode before it was finished.

DD: Even from the start, I remember the first night when we got it working on fourplayer and it was like running at 8Hz or something, and Bond was running around as if he was on a trolley, and everyone was Bond and it crashed every five seconds.

Edge: Were you not spreading your resources thinner by looking after both the oneplayer and the multiplayer game?

MH: Well, we managed to fit it in. It was Stephen Ellis who had the task of implementing the multiplayer and he did an excellent job. I suppose in a sense the resources were spread thinner, yes, but not much thinner.

Edge: Perhaps the most world-renowned multiplayer game is *Quake* – was that a major influencing factor?

MH: No, not at all.

Dave: In fact we only played multiplayer *Quake* for the first time yesterday.

KH: There's been a lot of discussion on the Net about how multiplayer *Quake* is the best multiplayer thing you can play so we've been trying it out.

Edge: And what did you think of those claims?

MH: It seems fun... but I wouldn't say I was bowled over.

KH: There's nothing original in there but, yes, it seemed good fun.

LIFE AT RARE

Edge: How would you describe Rare if you had to sum it up in one media-friendly soundbite?

DD: It's just lots of people who are mad on games.

MH: Everyone just has an incredible passion for games, and also has the best equipment – exactly what we want, exactly what we need.

KH: We have a great working environment not only in terms of quality of where we are, but quality of the equipment that we use. You get what you need to do the job – it's not a question of 'Oh no, you can't have this software because we can't afford it'. If you need a certain item of software you'll get it, and then you know you can do your job with it. That's probably why we turn out some good quality stuff.

MH: And why so few people leave the company, as well.

KH: I assume a game like *GoldenEye* is a major investment for a company like Rare. There are probably not a lot of companies out there that could put the sort of investment that we put into *GoldenEye*, but Nintendo were happy to let us get the game the way we wanted it. Although we had deadlines to meet, there wasn't the pressure saying 'Right, stop now, let's get it out'. We got it



finished to a degree that we were very happy with.

Edge: It must be the one of the very few film licences that have really done any justice to the source material.

KH: I think we were all quite nervous when we started, when they said, 'Do you want to do James Bond type of game?'

DD: Yes, they're usually the kiss of death, film licences.

KH: It just made us more aware that we'd have to produce something very exceptional to try and break out of that expectation, because we knew it would face that kind of 'Oh, it's a film licence' – so you've got to make sure it is good, then.

MH: It's just a question of aptitude to your work.

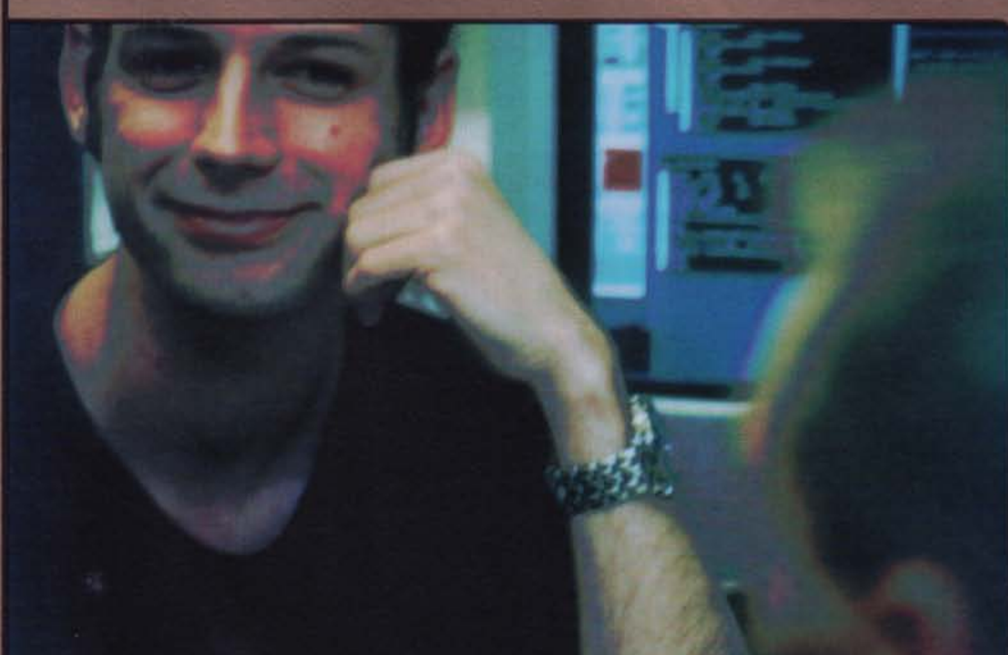
Edge: Had you worked at other companies before starting here?

MH: Not in the software industry, no. By and large there are very few people at Rare who've worked at other software companies.

KH: I was fresh out of university, I came from an architectural background. I did a BA in Architecture and spent a lot of time working with CAD systems and thought it was a lot more fun just doing nice graphics than actually designing buildings, so I went and did a computer graphics course in Bournemouth and then I looked around the software companies and Rare were the first to offer me a job. I came here and have had a great time ever since.

MH: Architecture's perfect...

KH: It is, yes. [Laughs] I get to build all the things I've always tried to build and no one complains that it's not plausible.



testscreen

The definitive monthly assessment of the world's latest videogames

GAMEVIEW

THE FIRST IN A REGULAR SERIES OF VIDEOGAME CRITIQUES BY GAMES INDUSTRY FIGURES. **RICHARD BROWNE** REVISITS *BLAST CORPS* FOR A FRESH PERSPECTIVE ON ONE OF THE MOST ORIGINAL 64BIT TITLES TO DATE.

Richard Browne has been in the videogames business for ten years having spent several years at Domark and Psygnosis (where he designed and produced *Microcosm*), and then moving onto Philips as director of worldwide development. He will be moving to a renowned software company around Christmas.

Blast Corps

In the 'my computer versus your computer' argument there are no winners, but the 'CD versus cartridge' argument is a far more interesting one. Instant access, to me, is more important than rendered CGI and CD sound, and the fact is that games like *Blast Corps* will never be written on the PlayStation.

Blast Corps stands by the philosophy of gameplay first, and doesn't move an inch. The concept may seem limited – it could have been written on an NES – but the execution is exceptional. The structure of the game is its strong suit, and one that harks back to the all preserving premise of gameplay before graphics. Rare balanced out the styles and controls of each of the vehicles well, each and every one designed for a different feel and making the most of the 3D world in which they exist. The train feels heavy and powerful, Skyfall feels nimble and quick, robots ooze destructive power, and Ballista, the only vehicle with a weapon, is mayhem personified.

Aesthetically the game still scores highly, though. The variety of the levels, from both a design and texturing standpoint, belie the limits of cartridge technology, as does the sound, with an array of musical tracks that are melodic and highly suitable.

After playing with each of the vehicles it's easy to see *Blast Corps* becoming repetitive, but Rare has cleverly incorporated a rating system that always keeps the next challenge in front of the player. It's addictive, and compulsively so. Also, in true Nintendo fashion there are lots of hidden extras, several end sequences and bonuses aplenty throughout the game. *Blast Corps* always creates a sense of achievement for the player – and that's something often overlooked.

Blast Corps could never be a Playstation game because if you had to wait for CD loading between levels you'd switch the game off. It's instant in its fun and has to be accessed in the same manner. Rare has not only produced a blinding game, but one that utilises the machine and the medium it uses to the full. Perhaps this is why Rare and Nintendo produce such stunning titles, because developing on cartridge allows them to have a focus. With CD games you can run and hide behind great graphics, streamed video and audio, but rarely do people look into the medium itself to seek out what they could do, rather than what people expect them to do.



Rare's *Blast Corps* (originally reviewed in E45) is still one of the most original 64bit titles yet created. Richard Browne believes it could only have been created for Nintendo's machine

Email submissions to edge@futurenet.co.uk

Index

VIDEOGAMES ON THE EDGE

The games – old, new, whatever – that have grabbed **Edge**'s attention this month



GoldenEye (N64)
Yes, Rare's firstperson extravaganza remains the multiplayer experience of choice. A disturbingly compulsive experience, as the manic cackles that frequently emit from **Edge**'s games room attest.



Rolling Thunder (Namco Encore, PS)
As soon as the in-game music issued forth from **Edge**'s Dolby surround-sound system, fond memories came flooding back. Was it *really* this unforgiving, though?



Bloody Roar (PS)
A total bolt out of the blue, the beta version of HudsonSoft's beat 'em up caused something of a stir when it finally found its way into a machine. Top graphics and gameplay make this very promising.



Cool Boarders 2 (PS) & Steep Slope Sliders (Saturn)
Opinion is divided as to which of these is the best snowboarding title to date, the PS title (above) being the art bods' fave, editorial preferring the Saturn effort.

Diddy Kong Racing







Keeping true to the typical Nintendo style of in-game visuals, Rare has made splendid use of strong primary colours with which to complement the marvellous graphical quality of the game





Each world possesses a boss, and progression is only possible when all of these are beaten twice

Despite Rare's insistence that this is a racing adventure, the second thing to strike players in *Diddy Kong Racing* is the similarity between it and a certain N64 racing game featuring Mario and his cohorts. And, possibly, to Rare's frustration, this is the game most gamers will compare it to.

The first thing most players will notice, however, are *DKR*'s rich, colourful graphics that will leave few people with little doubt as to which of the two wins the beauty contest. Fortunately, the Warwickshire-based company has also imbued the game with quality to accompany the visuals, turning this into something quite special.

There are further aspects of *DKR* that are borrowed from other Nintendo games, such as the need to collect a specific number of balloons before being allowed entry to the worlds and the races within them. Indeed, as in *Super Mario 64*'s opening level, most players will spend a good few minutes simply exploring the central area, hovering past its majestic waterfalls, flying through its colourfully lit tunnels, driving down to its sandy beach and discovering its secret paths before entering the prehistoric demeanour of Dino Domain (the game's easiest world) and competing in the actual races.

From then on, it's a case of taking part in a seemingly endless procession of challenges: first, players must race on and win the world's four courses before racing a boss on his own track.

Only when the latter is vanquished does *DKR* truly begin to reveal its adventure side: the Silver Coin Challenge is issued and sees players attempting to collect eight coins from each of the four tracks, as well as beating the opposition to the finish line. The boss (in improved form) is then faced again, and defeating him a second time rewards players with a piece of amulet. Do the same in the three remaining worlds – the snowy antics of Snow Flake Mountain, the watery and sandy nature of Sherbert Island, and the pretty villages of Dragon Forest – and Wizpig, *DKR*'s final boss, can be challenged to a race.

While most other games would leave it at that, *DKR* goes further – much further, in fact. Wizpig's demise opens up another world, the space-set Future Funland, which possibly contains the most inventive set of tracks, including several loop the loops, many tight and twisty sections and a trench sequence very reminiscent of the







It isn't unusual for players to go round a corner and find something quite unexpected (top). Of course, every track has alternative routes (above)

Format: **N64** Publisher: **Rare** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£50** Release: **December 1 (UK)**







The well in one of the tracks from Dragon Forest (top) is just one of the game's wealth of shortcuts



Fourplayer races are not as close as their equivalent in *Mario Kart 64* and as such fail to truly involve players, and some of the later tracks can prove confusing (above)

Death Star sequence in the original 'Star Wars' movie. Access to this futuristic setting, however, is only granted once players successfully complete the Trophy Cup Challenge on each of the terrestrial worlds. Similar to *Mario Kart*'s oneplayer game, players race on each of the world's four tracks in succession, with points awarded for the final standings.

But that's not all, for hidden amongst one of the tracks in each of the worlds is a key that opens up a battle arena where, for example, four characters fight it out to be the first to accumulate ten bananas in their respective chest, or be the last one left standing at the end of combat having used power-up weapons within a three-tiered ice domain or the open watery expanse of the Sherbert Island arena.

And that's still not all, because once all of the above is done, with Future Funland conquered and Wizpig finally beaten, *DKR* is only 50 per cent complete. Rarely has a racing game demanded so much from players. There's more, too, in the form of a time trial mode, secret characters, and perhaps more importantly, a multiplayer option. Up to four players can participate in single races, trophy cups, or any of the battle arenas. If *DKR* has a any weakness, then this is possibly it (albeit a small one). Although the frame rate and graphical detail drop is noticeable, it's not as significant as fourplayer *Mario Kart 64*. Rather, the problem lies in players needing to be familiar with the tracks before any kind of competitive atmosphere is achieved. This is particularly true of the later courses, which can still prove a confusing and strangely soulless experience even for adept players – somehow multiplayer racing is a closer run thing in *MK64*. However, the battle mode saves the day by proving highly addictive as players drive, fly and hover frantically around the arenas deploying weapons on each other.

The vehicles themselves handle intuitively and differ greatly depending on the character selected – some are particularly manipulable while not necessarily the fastest, while others may suffer in the acceleration stakes yet boast higher speed. Each will suit some players more than others, with most people likely to find a firm favourite among the eight initially offered. To win races, however, players will also need to make use of the turbo boost marks and power-ups dotted around the tracks. In a rare touch of innovation, the latter can be tripled in power by collecting a trio of similarly coloured balloons in a row.

While the unprecedented – and highly commendable – amount of tasks in *DKR* are a player's dream, they also represent a nightmare from a review perspective. *DKR* is a game that consumes time as if it's a tangible commodity whose existence is rapidly expiring. Yet this is hardly a complaint as playing it is so enjoyable. Every race offers the opportunity to spot something new; a hitherto undiscovered shortcut, another facet of the other characters' behaviour, or yet one more detail in the track's intricate decor itself. For instance, exploring each track in search of the battle-mode keys allows player to take the time to appreciate the beauty of the levels which might not be immediately apparent under racing conditions – it's great fun and never infuriating, even when it comes to the cunningly hidden key of the Dragon Forest world. Furthermore, players aware of the frustration caused by *MK64*'s 'cheating' opponents will welcome the level of advanced AI displayed by *DKR*'s protagonists – it's actually possible to pull away from the rest of the pack and not find yourself immediately overtaken by them should a momentary loss of speed result from scraping a tree. Here every character seems to react to their surroundings in a far more convincing fashion – very probably a factor that was consciously implemented during development.

Admittedly, apart from the significant introduction of the adventure element into a racing title, there is little in *DKR* that represents genuine originality. Yet what it manages to achieve as a complete package is markedly better than what it imitates and as such, oneplayer *DKR* is everything *Mario Kart 64* should have been. For once, Nintendo has been beaten at its own game.

Edge rating:

Nine out of ten



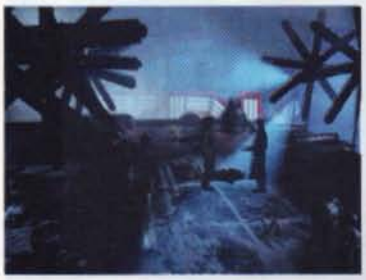


The battle arenas, either in two or fourplayer mode (above and centre), prove a very enjoyable experience as players try to beat each other



Spending time exploring the game's central area before entering any of the worlds is surprisingly enjoyable

Blade Runner





McCoy is captured by the Replicants in a scene above the Bradbury Hotel that mirrors the movie's finale. Many scenes either evoke memories of the movie or reproduce them outright







FMV sequences may be regarded as superfluous by many, but it's hard not to be impressed by some of the finest character detail and animation around. Audio is, incredibly, just as well realised

Although it hasn't suffered the volume of hyperbole usually reserved for titles of this importance, *Blade Runner* nevertheless has much to live up to. Not only have gamers been waiting for more than a decade for a faithful interpretation of the sci-fi classic, but Westwood's recent glories have also upped expectations to dizzying heights. A run-of-the-mill licence sporting some impressive FMV simply won't do.

That the developer has opted for a point-and-click adventure structure comes as some relief. Certainly this is a title packed to bursting with rendered cut-scenes, most recreating the scenes from the big screen with astonishing accuracy. But they are by no means the highlight here. Rather it's the strength of the scripting, the versatile power of the realtime graphics engine, and the constant mirroring of themes from the movie that firmly establish *Blade Runner* as a real cutting-edge experience.

Some will view the conventional nature of the adventure format as something of a cop out, but any other approach would inevitably lean toward the dreaded interactive movie, or – arguably far worse – the tired old platform game treatment. And crucially the game deviates far from the normal adventure, focusing on detective work rather than clichéd puzzle solving. This not only evokes the detective noir elements of the film, but also affords Westwood the opportunity to include fully interactive technology from the film – namely the ESPER computer and the Voigt-Kampff test.

These two elements are essential to progress in the game, with the ESPER machine enabling the player to





The nature of the characters' generation means that they can look a tad rough up close – but perfectly presentable when viewed from these distances. The backgrounds, meanwhile, are never less than magnificent

analyse photographic evidence, zooming right in without loss of detail and even locating vital visual clues by making the images almost 3D. It works in an almost identical fashion to its cinematic counterpart, right down to the way it looks and sounds. Like so many of the game's elements, it feels so right. The Voice Kampff sequence is equally well implemented, its combination of stress-inducing questions and retinal examination helping to reveal whether suspects are human or merely 'humanoid' Replicants. *Blade Runner* fans will even recognise several familiar lines of questioning.

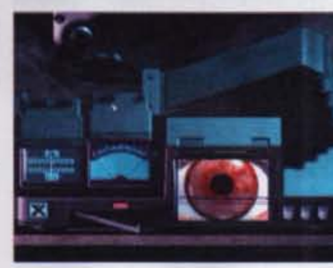
Much of the two-and-a-half-year development time has obviously been spent ensuring the in-game visuals are just as evocative as the cut scenes. Although the backgrounds have the detail of prerendered images, there are several tracking shots where the camera swoops down through a scene, and each location also possesses all manner of realtime tricks. Key amongst these is the use of lighting and atmospheric effects, bringing Ridley Scott's trademark high-contrast style to life through the use of roving beams, shafts of light filtering through rotating fans, and much smoke rising from the gutters. Every scene is either in shadow or lit by some flashing neon sign, all of which has some effect on the characters as they explore the environment. It appears to have been achieved by using light-sourced voxels, which has the unfortunate side effect of severe pixellation when characters get close, but provided they keep their distance, *Blade Runner* boasts some of the most convincing realtime scenes yet seen on a PC.

And yet *Blade Runner* doesn't feature Deckard, Harrison Ford's character in the film. Instead the player is given control of McCoy, a new recruit to the *Blade Runner* unit, who aside from his rookie status and a less sombre demeanour, mirrors Harrison Ford in a suspicious number of ways. Not only is McCoy given to wearing a long brown coat and severely cropped hair, he's also given the task of tracking down and 'retiring' a gang of escaped Replicants who, as in the movie, have returned illegally to Earth in an attempt to cheat their programmed-in four-year lifespan.

The reasons for using a new protagonist are obvious, but it does raise some sticky questions – such as why so many characters, scenes and situations are identical to those found in Deckard's own case, when the two stories supposedly dovetail. McCoy is also rather less interesting that his colleague, his dialogue hitting a lighter tone that sometimes sounds utterly out of place in the *Blade Runner* world. The age-old problem of combining an intelligent filmic script within the context of a freefrom adventure environment also creates the inevitable glitches, with conversations being purely context-sensitive (although players do get to alter McCoy's overall mood) and coming a little unglued when there's no essential dialogue to deliver.



The movie's ESPER machine, capable of rendering photo detail in 3D space, is faithfully recreated





KIA, another piece of detective technology from the movie, stores and sorts clues ready for analysis

Such criticisms hardly seem relevant when weighed up against the rich gameplaying experience offered by *Blade Runner*, however. The emphasis on real detective work, the emotional resonance of Replicant hunting (players can even elect to switch sympathies, aiding and abetting the quest to extend their short lifespan), and the sheer power of the script provide an experience far more individualistic than the format would suggest.

Special mention must also go to the work that's gone into making this a less-than-linear experience. Granted, there are still a number of predefined plot strands to work through. But with all but two of the Replicants randomly chosen from a possible 15 suspects for each new game, and code to give every in-game character the ability to move around and make rudimentary decisions for themselves, there's a real sense that events are unfolding in a semi-random, realtime manner. It's even possible to miss out key events completely if McCoy isn't in the right place at the right time.

Such dedication to pushing forward the boundaries of adventure gaming is admirable, particularly in a title existing in the traditionally vapid world of the movie spin-off. Some problems with combining interactivity and storytelling remain, but then it's hard to see how Westwood could have overcome such obstacles given the breadth and scope of its ambitions. Most importantly *Blade Runner* gets it right where it matters, in the level of tension, enjoyment and satisfaction it delivers as players work their way through the world first brought to life by director Ridley Scott and his team of visual futurists all those years ago. As befits its name, *Blade Runner* is a cutting edge piece of software as well as a stunning slice of pseudo-film noir. E

Edge rating:

Nine out of ten





***Blade Runner* takes the tired point-and-click adventure game format and elevates it to a new level**

Format: **PC CD-ROM** Publisher: **Virgin Interactive Entertainment** Developer: **Westwood Studios** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now**

The Curse of Monkey Island





The attention to detail on even map screens such as these is astounding – the clouds are wonderfully drawn

Five years on from the second *Monkey Island* game and LucasArts, minus the original creator of the series, Ron Gilbert, has released a third instalment. Strange (or typical) for an industry so devoid of fresh ideas that no pirate games are released for years, then two turn up at once – first Psygnosis' *Overboard!* and now *The Curse of Monkey Island*. But while *Overboard!* had both the challenge and the luxury of being a new product, this title has an enviable reputation to live up to.

The Curse of Monkey Island remains faithful to the conventions of its point-and-click adventure ancestry, while visually outstripping many traditional television cartoons. Make no mistake, this game is a graphical delight from beginning to end. And with the proliferation of titles making exclusive use of 3D, it's a refreshing change to be confronted by *The Curse of Monkey Island*'s highly stylised hand-drawn characters and backdrops, just as it was when *Yoshi's Island* was released on the SNES. While the main characters retain the classic cartoon trait of being flat shaded against the backdrops, many of the usable objects are now drawn to the same standard as the scenery. This quality is a step forward for the genre, making interaction with objects less obvious, although it can also complicate the solution of puzzles. Discovering items can often be a matter of waving the pointer around the screen until the name of an object or person appears, revealing that it was designed with the specific intention of being collected, pushed, examined or talked to.

As with the other games in the series, *The Curse of Monkey Island*'s strongest asset is its humour. Few videogames that have been created as deliberately funny titles have really worked (although **Edge** can recall some that have succeeded unintentionally). As players guide hero Guybrush Threepwood around the wonderfully stylised pirate world, it becomes clear that – contrary to popular opinion – western design teams do have the ability to populate a fictional world with strong, distinctive characters. The level of wit is maintained right through to the options screen, which has a dimmed checkbox offering 'Enable 3D acceleration'. Clicking on this reveals a 'We were only kidding' message, a second time gives 'No, really, there's no 3D acceleration in this game', a third 'You can click all you want, it won't do anything'.



***The Curse of Monkey Island* is highly referential, with characters from past adventures resurfacing**





Variation between light and dark adds much to the atmosphere of scenes



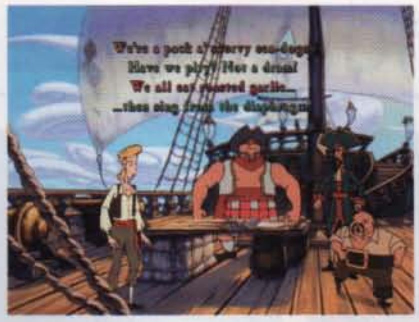
Interaction is entirely a point-and-click affair. Although text lines are shown here, both those and the in-game speech are switchable. While fun at first, the game has little replay interest, and feels slightly dated at times

Format: **PC CD-ROM** Publisher: **LucasArts** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now**





Guybrush Threepwood must light these lamps in the correct order to reveal an 'X marks the spot'







After Guybrush outsmarts this obnoxious lemonade seller, the diminutive conman returns as a seller of heavy weaponry. All of the in-game characters encountered are equally well designed

While details like this are nothing special in themselves, by filling the game world with them LucasArts has created a uniquely post-modern experience. In another section it appears that Threepwood has died, and a bystander comments, 'Funny, I didn't think you could die in LucasArts adventure games.' The credits roll, before it becomes clear that the game is far from over. Characters in *Curse* have a Simpsons-esque awareness of American culture and the fact that they're in a game.

Unfortunately, in its quest to create fill *The Curse of Monkey Island* with humour, LucasArts has failed to pay enough attention to the puzzles. Straightforward tasks have never been a staple of the *Monkey Island* games, but some of those in *Curse* are too oblique. LucasArts has also attempted to include action sections in the game, the first two playing well, but the third, in which the player lurches around the ocean in a pirate ship, being risible.

After *Broken Sword 2*, playing through *Curse* often proves frustrating, even allowing for the conundrums being intentionally odd. When Threepwood is caught in quicksand, with no indication as to how to escape, the eventual solution is so illogical that it can only be reached by trying every object in his inventory with every other. But as LucasArts' own press release states, 'How can you not like a game that includes funny pirates, vegetarian cannibals and a guy named Snugglecakes?' For some gamers, that may indeed be enough.

Edge rating:

Eight out of ten



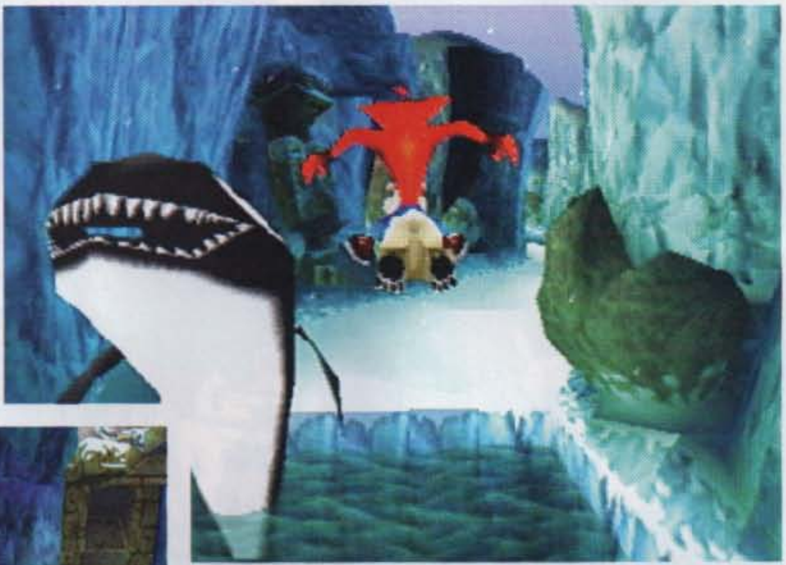




At one point the hero gets involved in a duelling banjo contest (left), which boils down to a simple test of memory

Crash Bandicoot **2**









Clockwise from top left: Crash runs 'out of' the screen in a bid to evade an angry polar bear; another arctic inhabitant makes its intentions clear; the old school horizontal-scrolling sections remain intact; Likewise, so do the jungle settings of the original

With one hit platformer under its belt, it was inevitable that US codeshop Naughty Dog would be tempted by the easy money of sequelsville, so it's no real surprise to see the mindless marsupial reprise his role as a Sonic/Mario wannabe in what rates as one of Sony's biggest hopes for Christmas.

Crash Bandicoot 2 is, if anything, even more handsome than its predecessor, thanks to a variety of new scenic themes and some impressive, though subtle effects. Whenever Crash warps his way to a new level, for instance, he beams in, 'Star Trek'-like; similarly, his arch-enemy's congratulatory messages are conveyed by an exceptionally effective shimmering hologram projected by a circling, hovering camera.

The colourful jungle graphics of the original have also been surpassed thanks to a much-needed mixture of styles: pastel ice levels, murky sewer scenes and deep space stages now all vy for the player's attention (true, their themes are dog-tired in themselves, but their appearance alone is worth note).

One of the biggest drawbacks of the original was its linear structure and obtuse save system, whereby bonus rounds had to be found and completed before a save was awarded. However, in the heat of play, the bonus tokens were easily missed and the player lost both his life and substantial progress – sometimes having to restart from the level before last.

Thankfully, the level select has been vastly improved for the sequel, using a system in which the 25 main stages are split into groups of five, each accessible from a central warp room. Stages can be played and re-played in any order, though all five must be completed before Crash faces an intermediate boss and, when successful, the next warp room.

Play follows the furrow ploughed by the first *Crash*: the 3D platform levels are divided between the same styles as before, with side-scrolling, plus moving 'into' and 'out of' the screen stages.

As well as the typical horizontal-scrolling sections, there are levels where Crash runs into the screen, performing the usual array of platform gags, or piggy-backing his way through the stage on the back of a polar bear cub (replacing the hog from the original game).

Once a warp room is reached, he also gets to run toward the player, chased by Indiana Jones-style rolling boulders or the aforementioned polar bear cub's dad – an impressively monstrous creature.

In each level, Crash's main objective is to find a special gem, though apples can be collected (à la Mario coins) to top up lives, together with witch doctor masks providing a one-hit defence, plus bonus life tokens.

And if all this sounds horribly familiar, that's no surprise: Naughty Dog has – seemingly – used the same engine as before, added some new creatures, different graphics and fiddled with the level structure. Admittedly, its designers have added a host of secret sections to task the more seasoned platformer, but it's all very much a case of 'more of the same' (to the point where the lack of imagination on show is almost laughable). Which is fine for those who adored the first game (and they are significant in number), and even better for players who liked the original but grew frustrated by its shortcomings.

However, it's a year down the line and *Crash Bandicoot* already seems rather tired. It was never the most original of titles first time around, and the remarkable lack of innovation in the sequel prevents any wholehearted recommendation.

Edge rating:

Six out of ten





The lack of new gameplay features in this sequel is quite shocking. Rolling boulders have been replaced by giant snowballs (above). Snooze

Format: **Playstation** Publisher: **SCEE** Developer: **Naughty Dog** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**

Pandemonium 2



When the camera swivels around impressively, as it does during the over-intimate view of Fargus here, it occasionally commits the cardinal sin of actively interfering with the gameplay. Bad news

Despite the fact that Nikki, *Pandemonium*'s previously tomboyish female character, has been remodelled as the ultimate post-Lara Croft übergamebabe, the real bimbo here is the game itself. Perhaps more than any other game in recent years, *Pandemonium 2* defines the epithet 'style over content'.

Unfortunately, this was exactly the criticism most often levelled at its predecessor, yet Crystal Dynamics hasn't simply ignored the problem – instead, it has exacerbated it. In many respects this is understandable, as *Pandemonium* was an unqualified success, particularly among less experienced gamers who were perfectly content to play a pretty but pretty vacant game.

The faults that undermine an admittedly impressive game engine are considerable. Its principal problem is one that simply shouldn't be present in a title sharing shelf space with *Super Mario 64*: the leap of faith.

At this stage in the development of the platform game players just shouldn't be presented with an apparent impasse which can only be overcome by jumping into thin air and hoping for the best. Yet far too often in *Pandemonium 2* this proves to be the case.

The game's structure is less specifically irritating but similarly shallow, with linear, far-from-mentally-challenging sections to negotiate. There is a key-and-door shape to the game, but the fact that players discover a key just before they stumble upon a door instantly does away with any satisfaction. Ultimately, then, all that's left is a simplistic left-to-right platform experience. But what about the stunning environments and that swooping, dynamic camera?

True, the environments are more impressive and colourful still than their predecessors, but the hyperactive, show-off camera can cause problems. Impressive as its pans, zooms and sweeps are, the fact that they often interfere with even *Pandemonium 2*'s unambitious gameplay simply proves the point. So much effort has been put into the look of this game that not only has little attention been paid to overall design, but the camera is allowed to meddle with the all-important gameplay, by either pulling in too tight for players to be able to see jumps or panning out epically so that movements become difficult to judge.

All this is ironic considering that Crystal Dynamics also has a hugely promising free-roaming 3D title, *Gex: Enter the Gecko*, in the works, which proves that the company is quite capable of better than this.

Edge rating:

Five out of ten



The game streamlines the distinctive character designs of the original









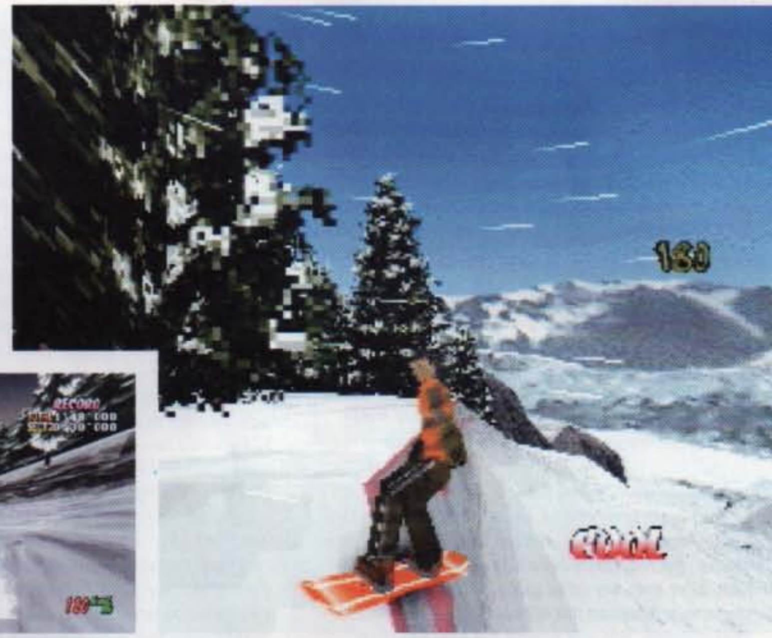
Rotating sections fail to deviate from the left-right formula (top). There's no denying that the game throws up some stunning scenes (above)

Format: **Playstation** Publisher: **BMG Interactive** Developer: **Crystal Dynamics** Price: **£45** Release: **Out now**

Cool Boarders **2** Killing Session







***Cool Boarders 2* is much faster than the original, while the design of the courses is also improved. Glitching is very much in evidence, unfortunately. The snow-spray effect which follows the boards is pretty weak, too**





The tricks in *Cool Boarders 2* have been more successfully integrated those of the first game, fortunately

Released in the UK in February this year, the original *Cool Boarders* was little more than a shameless cash-in on the snowboarding craze. Inspired by Namco's almost-as-weak arcade game, *Alpine Surfer*, *Cool Boarders* wouldn't have looked out of place running on Sega's 32X. The game appeared part complete, receiving a generous six out of ten in **E**42. Weighed down by glitchy graphics, ill-conceived design, and downright terrible music, *Cool Boarders* still held a strange appeal for fans of the sport.

Thankfully, developer UEP-Systems has realised the error of (some of) its ways. It has made significant improvements to the structure of the game for this sequel (beyond merely lumbering it with the sad tag 'Killing Session'). By introducing radical new concepts such as a twoplayer mode, CPU-controlled opponents, and near-listenable music, UEP has sharply dragged *Cool Boarders* into the realms of acceptability.

The best aspect of the original was the inclusion of tricks for the player to learn and perfect. *Cool Boarders 2* builds on this well, adding many more jump opportunities to the new tracks, plus a halfpipe designed purely for scoring points from stunts. Actually executing the tricks is a matter of pulling off various button combinations, which are usefully shown during loading screens. Practising these is the only sure-fire way to succeed in the game, and performing some of the more spectacular moves is a surprisingly satisfying experience.

In-game visuals still leave much to be desired, lacking so much that is taken for granted in the current wave of PlayStation software. Glitching is still prevalent on all courses, although a reasonable sense of speed is conveyed. Characters still suffer from a paltry polygon count, and the snow is still decidedly angular. Meanwhile, the number and quality of courses has dramatically increased, with one featuring snowbound vehicles to jump over. The front-end is now far more inviting, featuring graffitied tags for the various option buttons. Music, meanwhile, includes hip-hop tracks, a big leap forward from the strict plod rock of the original game.

With winter sports games undergoing something of a resurgence this season, several titles are about to be released on various formats. While by no means premier among them, *Cool Boarders 2* is a marked improvement over its predecessor, and should please snowboarding PlayStation owners. Ultimately, though, **Edge** can't help feeling that this is merely the game *Cool Boarders* should have been the first time out.

Edge rating:

Seven out of ten



The split-screen option is exactly what *Cool Boarders* was originally lacking, and it runs well

Format: **PlayStation** Publisher: **SCEI** Developer: **UEP-Systems** Price: **¥5,800 (£30)** Release: **Out now (Japan)**

TOCA Touring **Car**







As with most racing titles, different views of the exciting track action are de rigueur, with the 'head cam' mode (right) proving the most convincing example of a firstperson view yet seen in a motor racing game, as the camera sways around, reacting to the car's handling on the track





Crashing against other cars or stationary objects (top) will result in realtime car body work deformation

The market gap for a PlayStation touring car game has now been filled courtesy of CodeMasters. The transition has been a successful one, with *TOCA Touring Car Championship* capturing the competitive nature of its real-life counterpart with aplomb. All eight circuits of the 1997 season are present in accurately modelled form, together with the 16 cars from the eight official teams, plus different weather effects, as well as the usual single race, championship, time trial, and split-screen twoplayer modes.







The racing action in *TOCA* is relentless, with cars constantly fighting to improve their track position

TOCA's only problem lies in the rough appearance of its graphics. Players accustomed to the detailed look of *F1 '97*, for example, will frown at *TOCA*'s comparatively blocky visuals (although they should feel at home with the amount of pop-up), but the speed and smoothness of the proceedings is more than likely to get them smiling again.

Yet what it loses to Psygnosis' racer in terms of graphics, it certainly makes up in playability. *TOCA* races are far more exciting affairs, with cars continuously swapping position as they bump and slipstream their way past each other, meaning the outcome of the race is never certain until the chequered flag is out.

The car physics, too, is particularly impressive, with vehicles handling intuitively at all times, whether on the fast-paced Silverstone or the technically demanding Brands Hatch circuit. Rarely has a racing game conveyed such a feeling of being in the actual car, particularly in 'head cam' mode, where players experience the action from the driver's viewpoint, witnessing the cars in front jostling for position and taking drastic avoiding action should one of them lose control on the track surface. Should this prove impossible, players will soon be admiring the game's realtime damage feature which has windows shattering, body panels deforming, and bumpers and bonnets littering the track after brutal collisions. Indeed, the racing is so close and competitive that surviving a whole race unscathed is unlikely.

There is currently no other racing game on the PlayStation displaying such levels of playability and sheer excitement. Only disappointing visuals prevent *TOCA* from earning a higher mark.

Edge rating:

Eight out of ten

Format: **PlayStation** Publisher: **CodeMasters** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£45** Release: **Out now**

Test Drive **4**



***Test Drive 4* features a great selection of classic motors, although in reality Jaguar's XJ220 would have no difficulty out-running ancient muscle cars such as these. In the game it is often a struggle**







On completing stages, the player is rewarded with four hidden cars, including this pumped-up Viper



The tunnel sections feature some atmospheric lighting effects

Any gamer who owned an Atari ST or Amiga will more than likely recall the *Test Drive* series. Built around the well-identified premise that simulating famous sports cars, such as Porsche's 911 and Ferrari's F40, on home computers would make for popular title, the games were immensely popular. *Test Drive 4* carries on the theme, featuring a range of old and new autos (ten standard and four bonus), from the Shelby Cobra to the Jaguar XJ220.

Pitbull Syndicate, an offshoot of Reflections, the creator of the *Destruction Derby* games, is the team behind the fourth incarnation of *Test Drive*. The original games suffered from being an over-ambitious concept on under-powered hardware. Today's hardware has given *Test Drive 4* the chance to shine, and the game's graphics bear comparision to those of its contemporaries well. While the frame rate is nothing to write home about, the level of detail is good, with boats on passing rivers, planes in the sky, and lighting effects on the cars.

But while *Test Drive 4* may be visually satisfying, the game itself leaves much to be desired. Poor attention to design detail causes some jarring moments such as black skidmarks being left on grass, plus it is missing the usually standard option to change the colour of the cars. Pitbull has also failed to include twoplayer support beyond playing through a link.

More serious are the basic flaws in gameplay. Although the action supposedly takes place on 'real' roads, with all the hazards that entails – on-coming traffic, crossroads, etc – there is no indication of tight bends (as found on real roads), leading to many frustrating, slow-motion crashes which often drop the player from first to fifth or even sixth. Additionally, while there is a difference between the handling of the cars, it runs no deeper than good or bad, and owes rather too much to the *Destruction Derby* games. Most frustrating of all is the traffic that occasionally crosses the road, causing unavoidable (and race-losing) crashes.

However, it is possible to create some decent, controllable powerslides, and the sensation of speed is well communicated. Ultimately, though, *Test Drive 4* is a shallow experience – an accusation that could also be levelled at the original games.

With the rumbling masses of quality racing and driving games looming ever larger, any new example needs to be exceptional to stand out. By trading on little more than its name, *Test Drive 4* proves itself a game of the old school. And in this instance that's not a plus point.

Edge rating:

Six out of ten



While very dramatic, high-speed powerslides like this are hardly fitting for a 'simulation' title

Format: **PlayStation** Publisher: **Electronic Arts** Developer: **Pitbull Syndicate** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**

Uprising



Attacks against the enemy are aided by back-up units, including bombers (left) and tanks (right)



If only everything was as easy as building structures in *Uprising* – massive container ships simply drop them from the sky, accompanied by a deep droning tone as they pass by overhead

Other than Westwood's own new expansion disk for *Red Alert*, *C&C* reproductions proliferate in the form of *Dark Colony*, *Dark Reign* and *Total Annihilation* (to name merely a few). But with Westwood itself acknowledging the need to move on from the genre – the next *C&C* game is said to be 'different' – realtime strategy games are demanding a shake-up. And Studio 3DO's *Uprising* provides just that.

Similar in style to Activision's forthcoming *Battlezone* (**E**52), *Uprising* takes the strategy elements from *C&C* and places them in a firstperson context. This dramatically increases the feeling of involvement, as the player now commands units directly from the heat of battle.

Set in a standard futuristic universe, the chief aim of the game is to establish 'Citadels' at predetermined points around the map, with combat directed from and fought in a 'Wraith' tank. Around the Citadels a variety of support systems can be built. Power plants draw energy from the chosen mission's planet (which then magically converts into cash), while the four support divisions – tanks, infantry, air assault vehicles, and bombers – can be called into battle at any point, achieved simply by aiming at enemy targets and pressing a function key. This simplicity is the core of *Uprising*'s appeal, although later missions can become fairly hectic as the Wraith and Citadels come under simultaneous attack. Long-term interest is maintained through being able to upgrade weapons, troops and Wraith through cash gained from power plants and mission rewards. Enemy strength also increases as the player works through levels.

With a 3Dfx card in place, *Uprising* generates smooth and believable worlds. Some set pieces, such as bombers grumbling overhead before scattering their payloads on opposing bases, are fantastic. Background music is as convincing as any Hollywood sci-fi movie, featuring dramatic orchestral sweeps and rumbles. Also, during battle, various radio messages cut in, which while not especially original, add to the overall ambience.

While seasoned gamers may remember the 16bit *Carrier Command* offering similar fare, *Uprising*'s 3D strategy/combat mix is a refreshing change in today's climate. As separate halves in each of its constituent genres, *Uprising* would be little more than competent. By drawing the two together, though, it's a satisfying whole that suffers only from repetitive level design. A definite step towards the future of wargaming, then. **E**

Edge rating:

Eight out of ten



Citadels have to be built at specific sites (above). The player can then control these as gun turrets



While *Uprising* is never visually spectacular, even when running with a 3Dfx card in place, its frame rate remains high and smooth. And, in strict gaming terms, few strategy titles are as intuitive to learn and play

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Studio 3DO** Developer: **Cyclone Studios** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now**

Sonic R











***Sonic R* demonstrates Traveller's Tales' Saturn expertise. Sonic Team's game design is complemented by an impressive array of colourful track features, such as a pinball table (above). *Sonic R* may have arrived too late to make the Saturn a contender, but existing owners will appreciate it regardless**





Knuckles in *Sonic R*'s novel 'tag' mode. So far, all have eluded him...

Like *Sonic 3D* and *Manx TT* before it, *Sonic R* is an alliance of Sega design and the skills of an external codeshop. While Sonic Team has dedicated its resources to the promising *Burning Rangers*, UK-based development house Traveller's Tales has been busy making the designs of Yuji Naka et al a vibrant, technically impressive reality.

If imitation really *is* the sincerest form of flattery, perhaps that explains the perpetually rosy state of Mario's cheeks. Bucking the almost distasteful current trend of 'borrowing' from Nintendo, however, Sega has marked Sonic's 'true' Saturn debut by creating an unusual, off-beat racer. *Sonic R* features five tracks, eight characters and a number of different gameplay modes, including the almost prerequisite twoplayer option. Its courses, however, differ from the linear norm by offering numerous alternative routes. The choice of Sega's signature character allows for many paths to be taken but, say, with Robotnik at centre stage, water is no longer a hazard. By this coin, character selection is rather more than a choice of which cartoon backside to follow.

Dedicated followers of Sega fashions will lament *Sonic R*'s arguably late release. Had it arrived for the format two years ago, console history could be, at the very least, subtly different. The reason? *Sonic R* is a visual experience par excellence by Saturn standards. Utilising a 'fade in' technique – maligned by some but virtually indistinguishable during play – *SR* almost eliminates pop-up and clipping, the modern-day 32bit equivalents of colour clash. Each course is well designed, their features sharp, colourful and crisp in definition. Rarely before has a Saturn title offered such polished aesthetics.

Each *Sonic R* course can be completed in a number of different ways. As well as the traditional accolades for first place, players can also gain credit for collecting a Chaos Emerald. These are hidden behind doors that remain resolutely locked until 50 rings are collected but, challengingly, are only 'kept' after a race should the player finish first. Finally, in order to collect secret characters, there are five special icons to collect. After finishing in the top three with these in possession, a one-on-one race with an up-for-grabs competitor ensues.

Sadly, for the dedicated gamer, *Sonic R* offers little in the way of rewarded challenge. Collecting the Chaos Emeralds and secret characters isn't markedly difficult, so the longevity of the *Sonic R* package, on paper, lies in the strength of its time trial and multiplayer modes. Surprisingly, this is not entirely the case. *Sonic R* does have a high replay value, simply because the variety of routes on each course encourages exploratory play, followed by a desire to 'perfect' each track.

Ultimately, it *is* the lack of courses that prevents *Sonic R* from becoming the seminal outing its gameplay and visuals build such solid foundations for. But if there's any game capable of reconciling Saturn owners after the disappointment of *Sega Touring Car Championship*, this is certainly it.

Edge rating:

Eight out of ten

Format: **Saturn** Publisher: **Sega** Developer: **Sonic Team/Traveller's Tales** Price: **£45** Release: **December**

Sega Touring **Car** Championship



Alternative decor for *Touring Car*'s vehicles is just one of its many extras. From an Internet-based world championship to secret tracks, this depth is sadly not supported by polished gameplay





Many gamers had high hopes for *Sega Touring Car Championship*, following, as it does, the remarkable *Sega Rally*. The (perhaps natural) assumption by those who played disappointing demos at the Tokyo Game Show and E3 was that Sega would, with the final build, come up with the goods.

Sadly, the release version of *Touring Car* is almost identical to the visually raw and decidedly flawed alpha version. Disregarding, for a moment, its poor appearance and variable frame rate, Sega commits a cardinal sin by utilising context-sensitive steering in a game many assumed would follow the *Sega Rally* 'powerslide' handling model. Thus, it's possible to struggle to align a car on a straight while, approaching a corner, the vehicle is suddenly capable of remarkably tight turns. Is this laziness on the part of Sega, a simplified control method as a side effect of hurried development, or an unusual creative decision? Regardless, it's a move sure to alienate videogame purists, supposedly Sega's current target audience for the Saturn.

Further comparisons with *Sega Rally* are inevitable – it is, after all, the benchmark by which all Saturn racing games are judged. But in every possible category of a head-to-head test, the results are unfavourable for *Touring Car*, despite the two years between the titles.

But, for all its faults, *Touring Car* is perhaps one of the fastest racing games available on any format. This sense of speed is enhanced by an effective engine sample – the sensation of acceleration is unique and worthy of credit. But *Touring Car*'s frame rate is not constant; its engine isn't averse to shifting to a lower gear without prior warning. The praiseworthy speed is handicapped by slowdown, making the handling of the various vehicles a rather imprecise art. Again, gaming purists will find this rather off-putting.





Championship winners are determined by total times at the end of three races, as in the coin-op



The original coin-op was hardly the best racer ever to grace arcades, although the Saturn version does at least provide a split-screen twoplayer option

Touring Car boasts five tracks, three available from first play, two secret. But these courses are rather short and, to be frank, visually poor. With other Saturn titles boasting impressive 3D performance – notably *Sonic R*, *Duke Nukem*, and *Quake* – *STCC* is an almost amateurish contrast, reminiscent of the many disappointing thirdparty PlayStation ports available for Sega's machine. Grainy textures and polygon warping contribute to its poor appearance. How can Sega sell the Saturn this Christmas on the strength of a game that, visually, doesn't come close to rivalling the two-year-old *Sega Rally*? The answer? It can't. E

Edge rating:

Five out of ten

Format: **Saturn** Publisher: **Sega** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£45** Release: **Out now**

All Japan Pro Wrestling Featuring Virtua



Competitors can leave the ring – of their own volition or otherwise – to continue the fight outside. There are specific moves available for this



AJPWFV's fighters are superbly animated, despite their over-ample girth. Another graphical triumph for Sega



Players' immediate opinions of a game are determined by the kinaesthetic check – that is, the feeling that a title either feels 'right' or 'wrong'. Such a simple intuition influences much of everyday life and, with the exception of the wrestling fanatic, will deliver a mixed verdict on *All Japan Pro Wrestling Featuring Virtua*.

While *AJPWFV* is undoubtedly a polished and slick representation of its oft-derided and ridiculed (yet curiously popular) subject matter, its development was not aided by a large selection of past titles to replicate or improve upon. Most genre avenues are explored on an almost weekly basis with the release of a new fighting or driving game, but wrestling – a curious and little-seen offshoot of the beat 'em up category – has naught but second-rate releases in its history.

Sega assuredly knows how to design combat games, so it comes as no surprise that, with AJPWFV, it has elected to utilise a control method based on the tried-and-tested *Virtua Fighter* system. While the A button can provide a limited array of immediate attacks, B – in close proximity to an opponent – engages combatants in a grapple. From this position players access moves with directional and button combinations, more complex throws and attacks predictably requiring intricate 'pad-pawing.

Such a control method seems lacking when present in a game without the immediacy of, say, *VF3* or *Dead or Alive*. Indeed, it could be argued that *AJPWFV* has something in common with Sony's *PaRarappa the Rapper* – button combinations are performed on cue in a manner Sunny Funny would no doubt find eerily familiar, while the 50/50 nature of its grapples make the game an almost turn-based experience at times.

Further play reveals depth beneath *AJPWFV*'s seemingly shallow exterior, but the previous criticisms remain relevant. Fortunately, it redeems itself by virtue of the sheer number of options it offers: *AJPWFV* is the *Fighters MegaMix* of wrestling games. From its detailed and comprehensive training mode to a comprehensive array of modes and characters, the game's characteristic attention to detail is noteworthy.

AJPWFV is yet another Japanese release unlikely to be blessed with a European release simply because, with its reams of text and oriental characters, a conversion would be too expensive considering the limited units Sega could sell in this territory.

For western wrestling fans this is undoubtedly a huge shame as *AJPWFV* represents the finest videogame adaptation of the 'sport' ever produced, by far overshadowing the once-popular efforts from Acclaim, for example. However, if this sub-genre is to evolve further, a more intuitive, realistic and immediate control and gameplay system is a prerequisite.

Edge rating:

Seven out of ten







In the unlikely event of an English translation, the fighters will change

***Fighters MegaMix* fans will feel immediately comfortable with *AJPWFV*'s training mode – moves are flashed on-screen. This is an essential starting point should players wish to learn the game's complex multipart moves**

Format: **Saturn** Publisher: **Sega** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥5,800 (£30)** Release: **Out now (Japan)**

Dead or **Alive**











***Dead or Alive* offers combatants an impressive number of spectacular throwing moves. It also offers Saturn owners, for the first time, the joys of the multipart hold – the ultimate move for the hardened beat 'em up fan**

Dead or Alive, now reaching the Saturn after a fairly warm reception in its coin-op incarnation, is not quite the brazen *Virtua Fighter* clone it initially appears to be. While moves are performed with recognisable key combinations and many attacks are lifted from Sega's beat 'em up series, *DOA* redeems itself creatively through the introduction of a 'hold' button. This allows for easy-to-access counter attacks and different styles of defensive play. With an opponent beginning a kick or punch, pressing 'A' results in a dodge, the pushing away of the opponent, or a low-damage punch or kick, halting the original attack.

Counters may not be an innovation per se, but their usage as an integral part of gameplay certainly is. A battle between *DOA* adepts is an endless chain of feints, blocks and dodges – to describe it as resembling a fight in a Jackie Chan movie would not be entirely inaccurate.





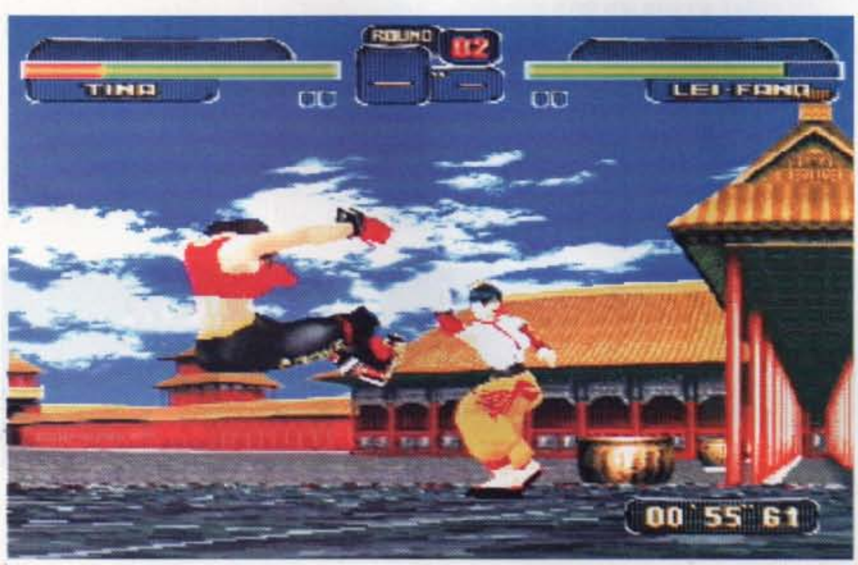
***DOA*'s training mode (left). The game's replays use a free-moving camera for dramatic effect (right)**

Dead or Alive's hi-res, 60fps visuals will both delight and astound Saturn owners. With a surprising turn of speed, its characters move fluidly against scrolling backdrops with almost no trace of clipping or flicker. Compared to *Last Bronx*'s excellent yet glitchy fighters, Tecmo's combatants appear to be of almost arcade quality.

Unfortunately, with so much hardware effort dedicated to character depiction, *DOA*'s arenas are disappointing. A square central area is surrounded by glowing titles that blast the fighters into the air after a knockdown. This provides many opportunities for juggling, but many will find it a curiously unsatisfying feature.

Another fault is that *DOA* is curiously short of characters. In an age where beat 'em ups boast cast lists well into double figures, its selection of eight main fighters and one 'boss' seems meagre, to say the least. The design of this frugal selection is also below the standard of, say, those of an average Capcom or Sega beat 'em up – *DOA*'s fighters come across as but pale shadows of *VF2*'s warriors.

Despite Tecmo's apparent lack of creative ambition, *DOA* sits comfortably in the company of *VF2* and *Fighters MegaMix*. As a more than worthwhile alternative to the weapon-based *Last Bronx*, it's a shame *DOA* arrived too late to feature on Sega Europe's Christmas release schedule – something that the company is no doubt lamenting, too.



***DOA*'s side-on camera view shifts into dynamic views to accentuate the power of certain moves. And, as it does so, there's not a trace of flicker to behold – a truly remarkable achievement on the Saturn**

Edge rating:

Eight out of ten

Format: **Saturn** Publisher: **Tecmo** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥5,800 (£30)** Release: **Out now (Japan)**

Testscreen roundup

MDK



On the initial release of *MDK* for the PC, developer Shiny Entertainment claimed the game would never see the light of day on a console. Now, only nine months later, PlayStation owners are in store for some of the same magic.

Running at a fairly steady 30fps, *MDK* immerses the player in a stylish future Earth scenario. Controlling the game's black-clad hero, Kurt, *MDK* players are committed to full-on action from the start. Commencing with Kurt plummeting head-first towards the Earth, the game is, put very simply, a 3D platform-shooting game. However, the variety in the gameplay is fantastic, aided in no small part by being able to switch to a zoomable sniper mode (as reproduced in *GoldenEye*). This enables Kurt to launch mortars toward previously untouchable foes, and to pick others off from a great distance. Kurt also has a beautifully fashioned parachute, made up of four loops, that can be deployed to drift across gaps or ride pillars of warm air.

***MDK* remains a super-polished game in its PlayStation incarnation, with heaps of original touches. Gamers bored of fighting and driving games really should consider treating themselves to something rather different.**

Edge rating:

Eight out of ten

Format: **PlayStation** Publisher: **Interplay**
Developer: **Shiny** Price: **£45** Release: **Out now**

Extreme-G

Owing much to Psygnosis' seminal *Wipeout* games, *Extreme-G* is a high-speed motorcycle game with a heavy emphasis on combat. This focus on weaponry seems to have been at the expense of handling, which is unfortunate for a racing game. The bikes have an odd relationship with the tracks, sometimes floating above rather than resting on them, leaving the player feeling as though the action may be beyond their control.

Solace is to be found on some of *Extreme-G*'s better tracks (especially those featuring looping sections), and in some of the more spectacular weapons which attach themselves to the bikes. Developer Probe has also included several multiplayer modes (for up to four participants), although these can prove confusing to play, with slowdown proving a problem, particularly when explosions are littering the tracks.

Though *Extreme-G* proves entertaining once players have invested time in getting used to its nuances, it's probably best to wait for *F-Zero X* for the definitive N64 racer.

Edge rating:

Seven out of ten







Format: **N64** Publisher: **Acclaim**
Developer: **Probe** Price: **£60-£65**
Release: **Out now**

Screamer Rally

3D accelerator cards have proved to be valuable shots in the arm for PC gaming. Running *Screamer Rally*, Virgin Interactive's latest racer, in its unaccelerated version – even on a 200MMX – reveals just how true this is. While by no means unplayable, the frame rate and detail levels fall to barely acceptable levels. However, through a 3Dfx card *Screamer Rally* is very smooth, despite a slightly alarming amount of scenery pop-up remaining.

Leaving aside graphical details, *Screamer Rally* is a massively enjoyable racing game. With six cars on the track, and seven courses to career along, the fundamental ingredients are fine. Where developer Milestone has really succeeded is in imbuing its game with great handling. Refreshingly, the cars actually feel as if they are attached to the tracks, and the response alters as the conditions change from tarmac to gravel. The overall impression is very much like the progenitor of all such games, *Sega Rally*.

On starting the game, only three tracks are selectable, the other four opening up after completing championship leagues. Returning to tracks further into the game reveals fog-bound and night versions of them. *Screamer Rally* also includes a split-screen twoplayer mode, which suffers no loss of speed, although the view fixes on the in-car mode. With slinky gameplay and a difficulty level that rises steadily as the player progresses through the championships, *Screamer Rally* has enough longterm appeal to make it a worthwhile purchase.

Edge rating:

Eight out of ten







Format: **PC** Publisher: **Virgin** Developer: **Milestone** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now**

◂ **Rampage** World Tour

Midway's original *Rampage* – now available via the excellent MAME emu – was an unusual but repetitive hybrid of gamestyles. With two other monsters to fight, buildings to smash, and bullets to dodge, it proved popular in arcades largely because it lent itself to casual play, but also because its multiplayer aspect was excellent. *Rampage World Tour* offers more of the same, albeit this time with scrolling playfields. The 'World Tour' of the title is justified by devastation in cities around the globe, with the occasional recognisable landmark cropping up for variety's sake. But *Rampage* is *Rampage*, and to spot significant differences between the '86 release and this current title is an achievement in itself. Midway can't be blamed for not – as the phrase goes – fixing that which ain't broken in a commercial sense, but despite *Rampage World Tour*'s instant appeal, it offers precious little in the long term.

Edge rating:

Six out of ten



Format: **Saturn** Publisher: **GTI** Developer: **Midway**
Price: **£40** Release: **December**

TOCA Touring Car Ch'ship

Having arrived at **Edge**'s office after the PlayStation game, PC *TOCA* proves as enthralling as its console cousin. While the software translation of *TOCA* fails to surpass the PlayStation version's roughness (see p94), the 3D-accelerated version excels, offering a detail level not found, or indeed possible, on the PlayStation, while retaining an all-important fluid frame rate. It therefore proves an even more realistic experience (particularly with a steering wheel), the sublime playability having been successfully carried over. Few PC racing games sustain such high levels of excitement.

Edge rating:

Nine out of ten



Format: **PC** Publisher: **CodeMasters**
Developer: **In-house** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now**

Silhouette Mirage





For those (hopefully few) **Edge** readers unfamiliar with the Treasure name, *Silhouette Mirage* reveals much about the Japanese codeshop's affinity for a style of 2D excess rarely found on the current crop of consoles. Huge scaled sprites, a wide variety of eccentric end-of-section bosses, and – by conservative western standards – bizarre assailants form the backbone of this latest release. Best described as a shoot 'em up with slight platform overtones, *SM* has an involved storyline updated during frequent text-based interludes, making a UK translation unlikely.

While its games tend to have a distinctive look and feel, an all-action approach is the hallmark of a Treasure game. *Silhouette Mirage* is a frantic, polished battle through esoteric locations. It also boasts a number of novel features. Chief among these is the two-sided central character. Firing from the respective profile damages assailants that are either silhouette or mirage – so there's strategy required in shooting. But, as has been the case with previous Treasure titles, otherwise absorbing play often degenerates into mindless button-bashing, a flaw no amount of scaled sprites or thoughtful touches can disguise.

Edge rating:

Six out of ten

Format: **Saturn** Publisher: **Treasure**
Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥5,800 (£30)** Release: **Out now (Japan)**

Gettysburg

Unlike Sid Meier's *Civilisation* series, *Gettysburg* centres around a few days in the American Civil War. The player chooses to be either a Confederate or a Union commander, and then takes part in a series of encounters, directing groups of men around the muddy fields and valleys of middle America. In short, its appears to be a microscopic slice taken from a much larger and more involving whole.

But *Gettysburg* is a very different game from *Civilisation*. By specialising on these key battles, Firaxis has created a pure and exceedingly deep war management title. The *Civ* control system may have been maintained (click on units, then click where they should go), but now the emphasis is on the minutiae of armed conflict, rather than decades of continent-wide chaos. And it soon becomes clear that intense field strategy is just as complex as empire building.

Meier has also cut back on the collateral detail. Gone are the trading elements, the bureaucracy, the politics; *Gettysburg* is purely concerned with combat, and uses few icons – charge, halt, skirmish, etc – to give the player control over soldiers. Admittedly, generals have their own set of icons which can be used to move about greater numbers of troops, but this doesn't compromise the overall simplicity of the interface. It is this simplicity that allows the user to concentrate completely on directing troops, on trying out formations and tactics, and on experimenting with the combat situation, without having to puzzle over an impenetrable minefield of keys and controls.

***Gettysburg* also gets the player closer to the action. A morale bar in the bottom left of the screen shows how confident a selected regiment is, and this confidence affects its accuracy and pace in the field. If morale gets too low, the soldiers will run away, so the player can't afford to think on a purely tactical level; measures must constantly be taken to keep subordinates happy.**

In short, this is an involving and thoroughly entertaining wargame. The graphics are primitive but functional, the scope is highly selective, and the subject matter is specialist, to say the least. But once players have mastered the basics of 19th century warfare, and have survived a few campaigns (there are 40 in total), they'll find that planning and attempting the myriad scenarios provides a greater challenge than many a pretender wielding a 'state-of-the-art 3D engine'. Very unlike *Civilisation*, then, but a very good game in its own right.

Edge rating:

Eight out of ten





Format: **PC** Publisher: **Electronic Arts** Developer: **Firaxis** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now**

Myth: The Fallen Lords

Myth is one of those games that's just a little too clever for its own good. It's a realtime fantasy strategy game, which pits the player's troops against a wide array of nasty evil types in a struggle between the forces of light and darkness. There's the expected background story and plot, which justifies all the carnage, but the real focus of *Myth* is on technology.

And, provided users have a 3D-accelerated PC, the technical side of *Myth* is stunning. The game is viewed from an isometric 3D view, displaying battlefields which are one enormous bitmap image – no tiling here – that can be rotated, zoomed in and out and scrolled around at leisure.. Over the top of this stroll the various animated units, and the whole thing uses 16bit colour. Backing this up is a physics model of quite astonishing detail and complexity. None of the in-game effects in *Myth* are prerendered – everything is worked out on the fly by the physics model, which even generates individual flakes of snow or drops of rain.

Unfortunately, once the player's jaw returns to its normal position (which may take some time – it is *very* impressive), he'll come to the realisation that the game itself isn't quite as special. The control system takes some time to get to grips with, but once it is mastered, there's little left more than a standard realtime strategy game without the construction of bases and new units. *Myth* is defintely an above-average effort, but it's sad to see that the lion's share of development effort has obviously gone into the technical side.

Edge rating:

Seven out of ten





Format: **PC** Publisher: **Eidos** Developer: **Bungie** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now**

Turok

Nearly nine months after their N64-owning compatriots (see **E**42), PC gamers equipped with a 3Dfx card can finally get to experience the dinosaur-exterminating antics of *Turok* in all its accelerated glory. Anyone expecting a major graphical leap over the original might do well to take a reality tablet, though – as smooth and crisp as the 3D-accelerated version may look on the PC, other than slightly higher resolution there is nothing here that will get N64 devotees trembling at the knees. If anything, some of the aspects are disappointing, with the same ludicrous amount of fogging evident in the console original making an unwelcome comeback.

Unfortunately, while visually this version (just) has the edge over the 64bit adaptation, it can't hope to boast as good a control system. Whereas players of the original had everything on one joypad, controlling *Turok* as he wanders around looking for opponents is awkward at best, with players wishing to recreate the original's analogue control having to resort to the usual keyboard and mouse combination.

However, other than the cosmetic improvement and control system, the game remains unchanged, giving PC owners the chance to revel in *Turok*'s eight wonderfully vast, imaginative, and action-packed levels.

Edge rating:

Eight out of ten





Format: **PC** Publisher: **Acclaim** Developer: **Sculptured Software (original code: Iguana)** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now**

Actua Soccer 2







Inevitably, the wheel turns. *ISS Pro* has dated, and previous title holder *Actua* may be poised to reclaim the championship with this timely sequel. It's still a choice between Konami's taut, disciplined teamplay and a much looser, almost haphazard style, but Gremlin has tightened its grip in all the right places. In presentation terms, *Actua 2* makes up the lost ground, with superb stadia, impressive weather effects (including an outing for the orange ball), the obligatory motion capture (provided by Liverpool prodigy Michael Owen), and a stunning, if rather too short, replay mode, complete with Sky-style ball-tracking line. If the players and kits don't quite match *ISS Pro*'s sternly angular teams, they are at least much improved, with detailed texture mapping. Meanwhile, the importance to fans of Gremlin's willingness to use real names without an actual license cannot be underestimated.

In-game, it's still very much an acquired taste, but a selection of forgiving difficulty levels, where the CPU takes some of the control responsibilities, make it a much more accessible game than its predecessor. An inevitable progression up through the levels to 'International' yields more detailed control, but there *are* nits to be picked. The passes selected by the CPU aren't always the ones players would anticipate (or even want), for instance, and the game cheats somewhat by giving attackers a consistent head start over defenders. Tackling, meanwhile, is slightly more difficult than it perhaps should be, but what do players want? Tactical acumen or rampant strikers? Either way, with Konami currently updating *ISS Pro*, the gamer will be the winner in this particular game of leapfrog.

Edge rating:

Eight out of ten

Format: **PlayStation** Publisher: **Gremlin** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£45** Release: **Out now**

NFL Quarterback Club '98

If there is one thing that separates NFL *Quarterback Club '98* from other Nintendo 64 sports sims, it's the quality of its graphics. From the moment the players run onto the pitch, the game displays an astonishing graphical experience, making use of the N64's 640x480 hi-res mode. Instead of blurred athletes sprinting around smog-bound pitches, therefore, the game presents the action in a clarity rarely evident in thirdparty N64 releases.

While the exemplary graphics and the wonderfully fluid animation make for a very pretty package, playing the game raises some serious questions. Regular armchair US football fans will find the usual four-button play system comfortably familiar but the way Acclaim's title coerces the gamer into chasing every lofted ball could prove too much for those used to the more simple (and successful) methods of *Madden*. Indeed, games can turn on instances of luck rather than the skill of the individual player. This is a significant problem for a title whose single games often last up to 40 minutes, and it can lead to a considerable amount of frustration.

However, perseverance uncovers a commendable sports sim underneath all the fancy graphics and the gloss.

While never brilliant, then, *NFL Quarterback Club '98* marks a welcome Nintendo debut for what remains American's number one sport.

Edge rating:

Seven out of ten



Format: **N64** Publisher: **Acclaim** Developer: **Iguana** Price: **$60 (£36)** Release: **Out now (US)**

Tomb Raider 2

Unsurprisingly, the main advantage of the 3Dfx version of *Tomb Raider 2* over its PlayStation incarnation is in the graphics department, with much improved textures and higher resolution visuals. The only area in which the PC format suffers is in the control department, which cannot compete with the ergonomics of a PlayStation joypad.

Every other aspect of the remarkable title remains intact, though, ensuring that PC owners can witness Lara Croft grunting around their monitors in style this Christmas, as they no doubt did last year.

Edge rating:

Nine out of ten



Format: **PC** Publisher: **Eidos** Developer: **Core Design** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now**

Armored Core

Sega's *Virtual-On* was a dream come true for many manga fans. A pure one-on-one battle game featuring Gundam-style robot suits, lacking in depth but not action. This copycat PlayStation title takes the concept and makes a much deeper game of it.

The key improvement is the upgradeability of the robots. Completing missions brings cash, with which new weapons, legs, boosters, etc, can be bought. While missions at first seem simple, fortunately the complexity increases, while a split-screen twoplayer mode makes this a must for robot nuts.

Edge rating:

Seven out of ten



Format: **PlayStation** Publisher: **SCEA** Developer: **From Software** Price: **$35 (£20)** Release: **Out now (US)**

F1 Racing Simulation

Ubi Soft is understandably keen to take full advantage of its 1996 season FIA license. Not content with reclothing N64 *Human Grand Prix* in an official livery, it's attempting to surmount Geoff Crammond's seminal *F1GP2* at the pinnacle of the PC racing sim genre with this 3Dfx-powered effort.

Thanks to substantial input from Renault's technical division, *F1 Racing Simulation* boasts some impressively realistic touches; the engine's piercing cry is sampled from a real F1 engine, and straying off the circuit causes grass or gravel to be picked up by the car's tyres, with a corresponding effect on its handling. No other racing game has captured so accurately the ruthlessly sharp jink-slice of the other drivers as they jockey for position.

Though much of the scenery has a curiously flat, cardboard-cutout quality, *F1 Racing Simulation* comfortably eclipses *GP2* in terms of atmosphere, from the pre-race tracking shot through the assembled grid to panoramic setpieces such as the flat-out plunge into Spa's Eau Rouge corner (with the hill and scenery beyond drawn in impressively early). A pity this graphical finesse wasn't extended to the rendition of the cars, which are flatly coloured and appear to float several inches above the track.

Where *F1 Racing Simulation* suffers is not in terms of peripheral detail but in the time invested in the subtle details that make for a completely satisfying game. The tactical elements – pit stops, refuelling strategy, car setup – are all in place and should make for a lasting challenge. But novices will find the auto-braking clumsily implemented in comparison to *GP2*, and long games can be as dull and lonely as the real sport if the track order becomes widely spaced. As such, it's good rather than triumphant.

Edge rating:

Seven out of ten







Format: **PC** Publisher: **Ubi Soft** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now**

Need For **Speed 2** SE

Boasting 3Dfx support, a higher frame rate, three extra cars, one more track, and new features such as a reverse mode, this 'Special Edition' is set to hit the PC and attempt to seduce gamers with its luscious visuals. Certainly this is the game's most impressive feature, being one of the few 3Dfx racing titles to draw far into the distance without suffering from pop-up. However, little has been done about the handling of the exotic range of vehicles on offer. Even on 'sim' mode, cars fail to behave with the nervous, twitchy nature associated with supercars, and as a result appear to float above the track. Cracking graphics fail to make this a great game.

Edge rating:

Six out of ten



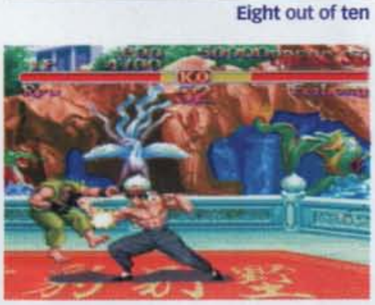
Format: **PC** Publisher: **EA** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now**

Street Fighter Collection

For those unconvinced by the fact that the *Street Fighter* series has advanced over the years, a package offering *Super Street Fighter II*, *Super Street Fighter II X* and *Street Fighter Zero Dash* (*Alpha Gold* in the west) will seem one street fight too many. But for the aficionado, the two CDs of this Japanese release are small objects of not inconsiderable desire. Were it not for a certain amount of slowdown and occasionally poor sound quality on the *SSFII* games, Capcom would have created the ultimate *SF* package. As it is, *Street Fighter Collection* is 'merely' excellent.

Edge rating:

Eight out of ten



Format: **PlayStation/Saturn (version tested)** Publisher: **Capcom** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥5,800 (£30)** Release: **Out now (Japan)**

Quake



Sega's coup in securing the first console version of *Quake* is lessened by the Saturn's inability to support the deathmatch of the PC original. Without mouse control or multiplayer mode, Saturn *Quake* is merely a good firstperson shoot 'em up. With Lobotomy's trademark lighting effects and a reasonable frame rate, Saturn *Quake* looks the part. Few architectural sacrifices have been made, while the 'look' function allows players to, with practice, admire *Quake*'s gloomy interiors.

Ultimately, *Quake* without deathmatch is somewhat akin to football without goals. It's still lots of fun for those who've not experienced the joys of deathmatch, though.

Edge rating:

Seven out of ten

Format: **Saturn** Publisher: **Sega** Developer: **Lobotomy** Price: **£45** Release: **December**

Moto Racer



The 3Dfx version of *Moto Racer* offered clear, super smooth biking, giving PC owners a title that could compete with the arcade nature of most console games. While it would be unfair to expect the PlayStation version to match the 3D accelerated visuals of the PC, there was nothing speed-wise that was impossible to reproduce. Ironically, that is this version's downfall – in attempting to recreate the speed, Delphine has gone overboard, producing a game that is too fast for its own good. Furthermore, the once-impressive replay mode has been substituted by something that, along with the other aspects of the game, lacks the elegance and flair of the 3Dfx version.

Edge rating:

Seven out of ten

Format: **PlayStation** Publisher: **EA** Developer: **Delphine Software** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**

Namco Encore

PlayStation owners weren't expecting another *Museum* instalment – let alone one featuring a total of seven games, including one of Namco's finest from the '80s...



The most accomplished game of the package is definitely *Rolling Thunder* (above left and top row), wherein players infiltrate an underground lair, pistol or machine gun at the ready. *Rompers* (above centre) is an unusual *Pac-Man* variant, while *Sky Kid* (above right) is a foible-laden '*Scramble* in reverse'



***Wonder Momo* (above) and *King and Balloon* (above right) are quite forgettable experiences, while *Motos* (above far right) is a simplistic yet wonderfully addictive little game**



***Dragon Sabre* is an accomplished vertically scrolling shoot 'em up from 1990, with power-ups, bosses, and twoplayer action**

Format:	PlayStation
Publisher:	Namco
Developer:	In-house
Release:	Out now (Japan)
Origin:	Japan



Import buyers can complete their *Museum* collection with '#' to complete 'NAMCO#'

Although Namco had lead PlayStation owners to believe that they would be completing their classics collections upon purchasing the fifth in the *Museum* series, a sixth instalment has now reached Japanese stores, offering another sprinkling of forgotten gems (and a few clinkers).

Of the seven games that appear it is perhaps *Rolling Thunder* that will be the most widely remembered. The inspiration for Sega's legendary *Shinobi*, *Rolling Thunder* sees players assuming the role of a red sweater-clad secret agent who dashes through umpteen levels of horizontally and vertically scrolling areas. Armed at first with a pistol, players can soon upgrade to a machine gun (by entering weapon 'cupboards' – a neat touch) with which to take down his assailants, who for the most part appear as hooded bad guys reminiscent of Klu Klux Klan members. Despite several fundamental design flaws which would not go unpunished today (players cannot fire while jumping, nor turn while crouching, for instance), *Rolling Thunder* retains a charm that was unmatched by many of its mid-'80s contemporaries, and a challenge stiff enough to keep softened late-'90s gamers on their toes.

Dragon Sabre, the sequel to *Dragon Spirit* (released on *Museum* volume five) is another highlight of the package, seeing players assuming the form of a mythical, fire-breathing winged beast. With a familiar array of power-ups, a twoplayer simultaneous option, and some tasty bosses, it's hardly classic material, but an entertaining blast nonetheless.

In keeping with the airborne theme is *Sky Kid*, a cute but primitive right-to-left scrolling shooter that will no doubt stir memories among arcade-going anoraks.

More basic still is *King and Balloon*, essentially *Galaga* played from a castle – the player controls two cannon-wielding sentries who shoot down balloons threatening to descend upon their beloved king. Weird? Yes. Fun? Not really.

Certainly more original is *Motos*, a title which most UK gamers will have only experienced via its conversion to 8bit computer formats by Binary Design. In it, players are charged with simply barging a cluster of opponents off the edges of a series of increasingly complex tiled surfaces in space. Power-ups are available, and it's the judicious use of them – along with an acute appreciation of inertia – that engenders success. A top little game.

Finally, two more less-than-inspired titles round off the pack: *Rompers* (essentially a limp *Pac-Man* update with jumbo sprites) and *Wonder Momo* (featuring a karate-kicking schoolgirl).

Rolling Thunder alone will be enough to attract most retro fans to the pack, and, of course, it's an absolutely essential buy for completists.

Sega continues to exploit both its high- and low-end coin-op hardware with a trio of promising sequels

Scud Race Plus



Highlighting the game's humorous nature, AM2 faces are mapped on the windows of the bus



It's heartening to see Sega's super-powered Model 3 board being used to create distinctly unrealistic environments (right)



Although Sega's Model 3 driving extravaganza *Scud Race* failed in gaming terms to deliver the promise offered by its shockingly impressive visuals, a sequel has nevertheless been spawned.

And, illustrating just how skewed Japanese game development can become perhaps better than any other recent title, *Scud Race Plus* sees development team AM2 shooting off at a definite tangent.

Perhaps the most notable addition is a new course, selectable under the heading 'Extra-Beginner Mode'. Inspired by Disney's 'Toy Story', the level is set in and around an oversized house, complete with gigantic furniture, leaving players feeling as though they were mere toys.

Additionally, by holding down the start button on the car selection screen, four new 'vehicles' are made available: a bus, an A825-23H tank, a cat (capable of speeds of up to 271km/h, no less), and a rocket car.

The new track is still playable with the original game's sports cars, although the aforementioned modes of transport prove far more appealing – when using the tank, for example, it's possible to fire at competitors.

The extra track also includes a bowling alley, on which the pins can be knocked down with the player's car.

AM2 has used *Scud Race Plus* as a excuse to enjoy itself – the team has even mapped its members' faces onto the windows of the bus. In the process it would appear that it has created one of the year's most diverting arcade driving games.



Racing as a cat must be a first – especially bearing in mind its top speed of 271km/h







The original *Scud Race* retained *Daytona USA*'s tail-out antics, something which should suit *Plus* fine. Disney's 'Toy Story' was the source of inspiration for the extra sections, as the rocket car (above) clearly shows

Developer	AM2
Release	TBA
Origin	Japan

Virtual On 2







The orignal *Virtual On* is still big in Japan, ensuring plenty of exposure for AM3's follow-up. Impressive Model 3 visuals are the order of the day



By far the most impressive of Sega's games at the recent JAMMA event was the sequel to one of its more oblique arcade titles, the mech-suit battle game, *Virtual On*.

While the original game was produced by Sega's AM3 division, *Virtual On Oratorio Tangram* (to give it its official, rather unwieldy title) is the work of AM2, probably due to the original producer switching to that team.

Retaining the twin-joystick controls of *Virtual On*, AM2 have simplified the turbo-dash to one button rather than two for the sequel. Other changes include improving the targeting and tracking systems, and, perhaps most significantly, realising the game using the still-impressive Model 3 board.

While the version on show at JAMMA offered only six finished mechs, the final game will have 12 to select from.

And while the original *Virtual On* featured a decent variety of weaponry, Sega has built upon the range, with different projectiles impacting in different ways on the arenas.

At times the close-range combat in the first game seemed a little superfluous, leading AM2 to re-work it for *Virtual On 2*, resulting in combat now also damaging surroundings.

With Japanese gamers having an insatiable appetite for anything involving Gundam-style technology, *Virtual On 2* should find an eager audience on its home turf, and maybe, with the obvious lure of sparkling Model 3 graphics, even in the west, too.



***Virtual On 2* allows players to choose from a wide variety of mechs**









Developer:	AM3
Release:	4th Qtr (Jap)
Origin:	Japan

Pounding the arenas with missile and foot, *Virtual On Oratorio Tangram*'s assault suits offer some elaborate destructive power. Combat is offered at close and long range

Winter Heat







Cheerfully circumventing Konami's official license for this Winter's Olympics, Sega's *Winter Heat* is built on the rock-steady foundations of *Decathlete*. Expect fast, frantic and – most importantly – enjoyable multiplayer gameplay

As part of the mild resurgence in athletics-inspired videogames, Sega last year released the under-exposed *Decathelete* into arcades. On its expected release on the Saturn, the game was well received (E36), partly for its humorous touches, more significantly for its accessible and rewarding gameplay. With the Nagano Winter Olympics fast approaching, Sega has unveiled its *Winter Heat* coin-op, again using the Saturn-based ST-V board. A home version of this AM3-developed game would therefore seem an inevitability.

While Konami has included ten events in its officially licensed console games (see p42), *Winter Heat* features only eight, made up of speed skiing, ski jumping, alpine downhill, short-track skating, alpine slalom, bobsleigh, speed skating, and cross-country skiing. The ommission of snowboarding events is surprising given the burgeoning worldwide interest in the sport (and, more significantly, considering that it's an official Olympic event).

Hopefully AM3 will retain some of the humour from *Decathelete* (aka *Athlete Kings*), in which contestants played on the excesses of real atheletes, with OTT afros, victory dances and ridiculous posing. The same irreverent attitude was carried over into the interpretation of the Olympic rules, adapting them to suit an arcade game rather than provide a strait-laced reproduction.

Like *Decathlete*, *Winter Heat* uses the ST-V and Saturn's hi-res mode, giving clean 60fps visuals. If it can also provide the same level of playability – despite the less immediately accessible nature of the sports under 'emulation' – it will surely be a hit.







A Saturn version of *Winter Heat* should be no problem, given the game's use of ST-V





The least promising of the events on offer is the cross-country skiing. Its inclusion is all the more remarkable given the omission of any potentially rewarding snowboarding sections

Developer:	AM3
Release:	Dec (Jap)
Origin:	Japan

Gallery

In recognition of the amount of effort that went into the production of *Blade Runner*, this month **Edge** features a clutch of stunning stills from Westwood's artists. Also, a certain Ms Croft puts in an appearance…







There can be few games released this year with more sumptuous CGI than *Blade Runner* (see p86). Both mechanical (Sebastian's truck, above) and human (Tyrell, left) details are realised with stunning flair.

Sebastian's truck rendered by Westwood's Eric Gooch and Gary Freeman; Tyrell rendered by Aaron Powell

The detail in this view of the Tyrell conference room (right) in *Blade Runner* nigh beggars belief. Westwood Studios used dual P6 200MHz NT workstations with 256 megs of RAM and a dedicated farm of 80 dual P6 200MHz machines (each with 256 megs of RAM) for daytime rendering during the creation of the game – and it shows. For overnight rendering the company has the use of over 240 dual P6 200MHz units. Such computing power obviously allows artists to concentrate on creativity, a factor which is so crucial when working on a project of this scale.

Three of the characters from the game (below, from left: Lucy, Guzza, and Tyrell) further demonstrate the studied approach taken by Westwood's artists.

All images this page rendered by Aaron Powell using *3D Studio Max R2*















Anyone familiar with the original movie with be impressed with how the Tyrell Building (right) has been realised in CGI for *Blade Runner*.

Image rendered by Rick Parks



When Probe decided to develop a futuristic bike-based game for the N64, it was perhaps inevitable that the conceptual vehicle designs would closely follow those laid down by the Japanese visionary Katsuhiro Otomo in his manga and anime classic, 'Akira'.

The finished game, *Extreme-G*, features some of the slinkiest visuals since *Wipeout 2097*.

Images rendered by Probe's John Taylor using 3D Studio and Photoshop









Yes, it's *that* girl again, although **Edge** suspects readers won't have seen the most famous videogaming heroine sporting this attire – or indeed modelling this pose – before. That's because the image was created specifically for use in this month's Gallery.

Image rendered using *3D Studio Max*, with extra airbrushing work in *Photoshop*, by Core Design's Phil Chapman

DEVELOP

VIDEOGAME CREATION UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

Mixed moods at Develop 97

While CGDC rapidly moves from a development-only conference to a major industry presence, the UK's Develop finds itself languishing slightly in a calendar which could be slightly too full for its own good. After a Summer featuring SIGGRAPH, CGDC, E3 and ECTS and with developers scrabbling to meet pre-Christmas launch windows, the abiding impression forms that there isn't really a lot left to say. Certainly the meagre sprinkling of exhibitors camped out in the foyer of this year's conference seemed less than delighted with their lot.

For this, the sixth Develop conference, organiser Miller Freeman had promised more space and more exhibitors, but last-minute alterations to the plans meant that it was business as usual again. That said, though, there was some interesting technology on show. SCEE was showcasing its Performance Analyser (see News), Newfire its Catalyst and Torch 3D game authoring and playback software for online development, and Metrowerks was demoing PlayStation *Codewarrior* while bemoaning the fact that final copies had been delayed by three weeks due to Elton John's 'Candle In The Wind 97' hogging CD pressing plant capacity.

While any conference is by definition going to focus on the actual conference program itself, it did leave some of the exhibitors **Edge** talked to questioning their involvement for next year and wondering whether just taking space at ECTS would suffice. If organiser Miller Freeman wants a successful exhibition to run in conjunction with the seminars and workshops in future, it looks like it has some serious work ahead of it.

The conference program, meanwhile, kicked off with a combative keynote from Eidos' Ian Livingstone forecasting that an A-title market necessitated the presence of A-title developers and everyone else was effectively up against the wall. Assessing the mood of Develop 97 overall was tricky but many of the speakers kept returning to this theme of the market calling for quality software, the underlying implication being that that's a long way from what many of the delegates are producing. And while **Edge** finds that a rather pessimistic view, it was interesting to note how many people were furiously scribbling down such basic points as 'in an adventure game, give your character motivation'.

Split into three streams – case studies and blue sky; production and technology; and a handful of workshops on such topics as programming network games in Java or writing games in OpenGL – it was notable that the blue sky sessions were by far the most eagerly attended. Intentional highlight was undoubtedly



Some exhibitors felt that this year's Develop fell at an unfortunate time, following several major trade shows

Sean Patrick Fannon's (Eighth Wonder) wilfully interactive and comedic harangue on online roleplaying, but in the end he was gazumped with a fantastically bizarre lectern appearance by Midway's **Eugene Jarvis**.

Having created classics such as *Defender* and *Robotron*, Jarvis is widely regarded as being a fully paid-up member of the industries pantheon of pioneers. However, it was felt that launching his doomed bid for the Booker Prize ('We necromancers of the Wired generation… breathe life into the dead pixel clay' being one of the least rococo phrases he used) at a development conference was odd to say the least. When the session was thrown open to the floor the first question was a plaintive 'What are you on and can we all have some?'

With his concluding sentence, though, Jarvis struck home. Develop 97 might have had a record number of attendees and might already have been hailed in some quarters as a romping success, but the underlying mood was darker and looking to the future with a troubled eye.

'At some point,' said Jarvis, 'the marginal utility of the nth sequel or the billionth polygon becomes zero. And at that point we game designers will have to actually get off our asses and design something.' What, another *Cruis'n USA*?





At this year's Develop, Eidos' executive chairman Ian Livingstone (left) claimed that only the top-quality game producers will survive in a crowded software scene. Midway's Eugene Jarvis, meanwhile, urged game designers to get off their asses

Kinetix Maxes out

The original *3D Studio Max* was released in the Spring of 1996 to widespread acclaim and in a year sold 25,000 units, 1,200 into the UK development community alone. However, in many ways it suffered slightly from trying to be all things to all people, and in aiming for the three markets of film and video, games and interactive, and design and visualisation, it was perhaps too general a tool.

Developer Kinetix took a step towards solving this problem with the launch of *3D Studio Viz*, a specialised toolset aimed at the design and visualisation market earlier this year. And now comes *3DS Max R2*, a product which the company claims adds over 1,000 new features and enhancements to the original, all targeted specifically at the film and video, games and interactive markets.

The film industry is an important market to crack for Kinetix and one which seems to be sticking slightly more stubbornly to its SGIs than the games field. There are exceptions like The Magic Camera Company which has installed a dedicated NT suite running *Max* for its work on the forthcoming 'Lost In Space', but on the whole it's the games field which is leading the way on NT. Kinetix is keen to point out that *Max R2* addresses both markets.

'This release is all about doing two things,' says the company's **Keith Russell**. 'It's positioning it better in the film and video space and including a lot of the stuff they've been asking for but also at the same time putting in all the wish list we got from games; the polygon counter stuff, new conversion routines to go from triangles to quads, there's lots of that in there.

'In essence there's over a thousand new features and enhancements and almost all of the wish list that we collected from our games users is included. If you want to pinpoint the key areas in modelling then there are new polygon tools plus NURBS modelling; in animation, motion capture, inverse kinematics and dynamics; in rendering a selective ray-tracer and a complete lens effects package. Then you have ASCII export, which is key to all the game users, and in the customising area you can also completely customise the interface. It also contains a scripting language."

The key, as ever, is price, the full product rolling out at £2,695 and an upgrade from *Max v1* costing £595. The significant factor



Westwood artists Aaron Powell and Frank Menpeola used *Max R2* to remarkable effect for *Blade Runner* (see p86)

is, though, that *Max R2* is bringing many features to its current price bracket for the first time. And as the development community moves towards realtime low poly modelling, some of the higher end companies look like they might have to seriously reconsider their strategies.

'A lot of people have said, "£595, what do I get for that?"' says Russell. 'Well, you get the same kind of leap as you got from *R4* to *Max*, but this time you pay £595. If I had my way I'd add a nought on the end – it'd still be cheap compared to what Alias|Wavefront and Softimage are on about.'





Images by Daniel Manahan and Steve Berlin (above), and Digimation Inc (left) demonstrate what the new version of *3DS* is capable of



Judging by the finely orchestrated preview footage, Konami's *Metal Gear Solid* has the potential to be a truly mould-breaking videogame, featuring possibly the best use of the PlayStation to date. **Edge** is the only UK magazine to have been invited to meet the team designing the game in Tokyo; an exhaustive investigation follows next month.

Edge is also jetting off to Japan to attend the Shoshinkai show. Now going under the moniker of Nintendo World, it is expected that the company will unveil its 64DD peripheral and associated titles at the event, as well as cutting-edge 64bit videogames such as *Yoshi's Story*, *Zelda 64* and *F-Zero 64*. For the most authoritative coverage of one of the most important events of the gaming calendar, look no further than **Edge** 54.

issue fifty-four

on sale December 23


04-11-97

9 771350 159014 13

53